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THE
ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BOMBAY
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'HE LOOKED DOWN UPON THE MAN WHOSE WORDS HE WAS REPEATING WITH CONTEMPT AND ASTONISHMENT.'

TO CALL HER MINE

ETC.

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BY

WALTER BESANT

AUTHOR OF

'ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN,' 'CHILDREN OF GIBEON,' ETC.

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NINE ILLUSTRATIONS BY A. FORESTIER

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TO CALL HER MINE.

CHAPTER I.

ON AN ISLAND.

'I WILL now,' said the German, 'read your statement over, and you can sign it if you like. Remember, however, what your signature may mean. As for what I shall do with it afterwards, that depends on many things.'

'Do what you like with it,' replied the Englishman, slowly and huskily. 'Send it to the police in London, if you like. I don't care what becomes of it, or of myself either. For I am tired of it; I give in. There! I give in. No one knows what it is like until you actually come to fight with it.'

He did not explain what 'it' was; but the other seemed to understand what he meant, and nodded his head gravely, though coldly. 'It,' spoken of in this way, is generally some foe to man. If toothache, or earache, or any ordinary physical evil had been meant, that German, or any other German, Frenchman, Russian, or Englishman, would have nodded his head with a sympathetic murmur. Since there was no murmur, therefore there was no sympathy.

The two men were, as you will presently admit, a most curious couple to look upon, set among most remarkable surroundings, if only there had been any spectators or audience to watch and admire them. The scene—none of your conventional carpenter's scenes, but a grand set scene—was, if possible, more interesting than the couple in the foreground. For in front there stretched the sea-shore, the little waves lapping softly and creeping slowly over the level white coral sand; beyond the smooth water lay the coral reef

with its breakers; at the back of the sandy shore was a gentle rise of land, covered with groves of cocoa-palms and bananas; among them were clearings planted with fields of sweet potatoes and taro; two or three huts were visible beneath the trees. Again, beyond the level belt rose a great green mountain, five or six thousand feet high, steep, and covered to the summit with forest. Here and there a perpendicular cliff broke the smoothness of the slope, and over the cliff leaped tiny cascades—threads of light sparkling in the evening sunshine. The time was about six—that is, an hour before sunset; the air was warm and soft; the sloping sunshine lay on grove and clearing, seashore and mountain side, forest and green field, making everything glow with a splendid richness and prodigality of colour; softening outlines and bringing out new and unsuspected curves on the hillside. The mid-day sun makes these thick forests black with shade; the evening sun lights them up, and makes them glorious and warm with colour.

As one saw the place this evening, one might see it every evening, for in New Ireland there is neither summer nor winter, but always, all the year round, the promise of spring, the heat of summer, and the fruition of autumn; with no winter at all, except the winter of death, when the branches cease to put forth leaves and stretch out white arms, spectral and threatening, among their living companions in the forest. Sometimes one may see whole acres of dead forest standing like skeletons by day and like ghosts by night, till the white ants shall have gnawed their way through the trunks to prepare their fall, and till the young shoots at their feet shall have sprung up round them to hide the ghastly whiteness of death. The reason of this commingling of spring and summer, autumn and winter, is that the latitude of New Ireland, as everybody knows, is about 4 degrees south, which is very near the isothermal line. People who desire to feel the warmth of this latitude—a warmth which goes right through and through a man, like light through a pane of glass—need not go so far as New Ireland, but may stop on their way at Singapore, where there are not only no cannibals, but the hotels—there are no hotels in New Ireland—are 'replete,' as the advertisements say, 'with every comfort.'

Considering that New Ireland has been visited by so very few, and that the place is as yet entirely unexplored, the fact that here were two Europeans upon it at the same time, and yet not arrived there with the same objects, was in itself remarkable; the more so because its people have a curious and cultivated taste in cookery, and prefer roasted Brother Man to the roast of any other animal,

insomuch that missionaries have hitherto avoided these shores, feeling that to be killed and eaten before converting anybody would be a sinful waste of good joints. After the conversion of many, indeed, the thing might take the form and present the attractions of serviceable martyrdom.

Where the situation and the scene were both so remarkable, it seems almost superfluous to point out that the appearance of both men was also remarkable; although, among such surroundings, any man might well strive to live and present an appearance up to the scene. One of them—the German—was a man of colossal proportions, certainly six feet six in height, and broad in proportion, with strong shoulders and well-shaped legs—both legs and shoulders being bare, and therefore in evidence. He was still quite a young man—well under thirty. His hair was light brown, short and curly; an immense brown beard covered his face and fell over his chest. His eyes were blue and prominent, and he wore spectacles. His dress was modelled generally, but with modifications, on the dress of the inhabitants of these islands. His only robe was a great piece of Fiji tapu cloth, white, decorated with black lozenges and a brown edging; it was rolled once round his waist, descending to his knees, and was then thrown over his left shoulder, leaving the right arm bare. The sun had painted this limb a rich warm brown. He wore a cap something like that invented, and patented for the use of solitaries, by Robinson Crusoe: it was conical in shape, and made of feathers brightly coloured. He had sandals of thin bark tied to his feet by leather thongs, and he wore a kind of leather scarf, from which depended a revolver case, a field-glass in a case, a case of instruments, and a large water-proof bag. These constituted his whole possessions, except a thick cotton umbrella, with a double cover, green below and white above. This he constantly carried open. He was smoking a large pipe of the shape well known in Germany. Lastly, one observed in him a thing so incongruous that it was really the most remarkable of all. You know the Robinson Crusoe of the stage; you know the holy man or the hermit of the Royal Academy. Both the Robinson Crusoe of the stage and the St. Anthony of the desert in the picture, are just as clean as if they had just come out of the bath, or at least had been quite recently blessed with a heavy shower, and they are, besides, as well groomed as if they had just completed a careful morning toilette. Now, Robinson on his island and the hermit in his desert may have been picturesque, but I am quite certain that they were always unkempt, unclean, and uncared for. This young

man—say this young gentleman—was most carefully groomed, although he was on a cannibal island. His hands were clean, and his nails did not look as if they had been torn off by the teeth—I have often thought of poor Robinson's sufferings in this respect; his face was clean; his hair neatly cut, though it was cut by his own hands, and had been brushed that day; his great beard was carefully combed; and his toga of native cloth was clean. Now, a neat and clean beachcomber is a thing never heard of. Always they are in rags; and, when they do descend so low as to wear the native dress, they have generally assumed and made their own the manners and customs of a native.

This interesting person was, as I have said, a German. Now, what is pedantry in an Englishman is thoroughness in a German. No Englishman could have worn this dress without feeling as if the whole world's finger of scorn was turned upon him: but to the German the dress was part of the programme. He had learned the language, and what he could of the manners, before landing on the shore. A dress as nearly as possible approximating to the Polynesian garb was a natural accompaniment to the language. The spectacles, the umbrella, and the cap of feathers were necessary concessions to European civilization.

The other man, one could see immediately, was an Englishman. It was also clear to anyone who had eyes and understanding that he was an Englishman of country birth and breeding. To begin with, his clothes were not those of a sailor. The rough flannel shirt which had lost all its buttons and one of its sleeves; the coarse canvas trousers; the old boots broken down at heel, and showing in the toes an inclination—nay, a resolution—for divorce between sole and upper; the broad shapeless felt hat—all spoke of the soil. His gait and carriage sang aloud of ploughed fields; his broad and ruddy cheeks, his reddish brown hair and beard, spoke of the south or west of England. No doubt he was once—how did such a one contrive to get to the shores of New Ireland?—a farmer or labourer. He was a well-built man, who looked short beside this tall German. But he was above the average height. His age might be about six or eight and twenty. His hair hung in masses over his shoulders, and his beard was thicker than his companion's, though not so long; and so far from being clean and trim, he presented a very unwashed, uncombed, and neglected appearance indeed. His face, which had been once a square, full face, was drawn and haggard; his eyes, which were meant to be frank, were troubled; and his carriage, which should have been

upright and brave, was heavy and dejected. He seemed, as he stood before the other man, at once ashamed and remorseful.

'Listen: I will read it carefully and slowly,' said the German. 'Sit down while I read it. If there is a single word that is not true, you can alter that word before you sign.'

The man sat down obediently—there was a curious slowness about his movements as well as his speech—while the German read the document, which was written very closely on two pages of a note-book. Space was valuable, because this note-book contained all the paper there was on the island of New Ireland, and had, therefore, to be husbanded. He read in a good English accent, not making more confusion of his f's and v's than was sufficient to assert his pride of nationality. And as he read, he looked down upon the man whose words he was repeating with contempt and astonishment. For the man had done so dreadful and terrible a thing; he had committed a crime which was horrible, and required the white heat of rage and fury; and yet the man looked so pitiful a creature!

'Listen,' he said again, 'and correct me when I am wrong.'

This was the paper which he read on the shore of the Pacific Ocean, and on the island of New Ireland, one evening in the year 1884:—

'I, David Leighan, farmer, of the parish of Challacombe, Devonshire, being now on an island in the Pacific Ocean, where I expect to be shortly killed and eaten by the cannibals, declare that the following is the whole truth concerning the death of my uncle, Daniel Leighan, of the same parish, farmer.

'He jockeyed me out of my property; he kept on lending me money in large sums and small sums and making me sign papers in return, and never let me know how much I owed him; he made me mortgage my land to him; he encouraged me to drink, and to neglect my farm. At last, when I was head over ears in debt, he suddenly brought down the law upon me, foreclosed, and took my land. That was the reason of our quarrel. I stayed about the place, sometimes at Challacombe, sometimes at Moreton, and sometimes at Bovey, till my money was nearly all gone. Then I must either starve, or I must become a labourer where I had been a master, or I must go away and find work somewhere else. I had but thirty pounds left in the world, and I made up my mind to go away. It was a day in October of the year 1880, which I remember because it was the cold, wet season of 1879 which finished my ruin, as it did many others, who that year came to the end of their

capital or their credit. I went to see my uncle, and begged him to lend me thirty pounds more, to start me in Canada, where I'd heard say that fifty pounds will start a man who is willing to make his own clearance and to work. I was that sick of myself that I was willing to work like a negro slave if I could work on my own land. But work in England on another man's land I could not. Said my uncle—I shall not forget his words—"Nephew David," he said, grinning, "you've been a fool and lost your money. I've been a wise man and kept mine. Do you think I am going to give you more money to fool away?" I wonder I did not kill him then and there, because it was through him and his lendings that I came so low. He sat in his room at Gratnor, his account-books before him, and he looked up and laughed at me while he said it, jingling the money that was in his pocket. Yet I asked him for nothing but the loan of thirty pounds, which I might pay back, or, perhaps, I mightn't. Thirty pounds! And I was his nephew, and by his arts and practices he'd jockeyed me out of a farm of three hundred acres, most of it good land, with the brook running through it and a mill upon it. What was thirty pounds compared with what he'd got out of me?

'I remember very well what I said to him—never mind what it was—but I warrant he laughed no longer, though he kept up his bullying to the end, and told me to go to the Devil my own way, and the farther from my native parish the better. So I left him, and walked away through Watercourt to John Exon's inn, where I sat all that day drinking brandy-and-water. I told nobody what had happened, but they guessed very well that I'd had a quarrel with my uncle, and all the world knew by that time how he'd got my land into his own possession.

'About six o'clock in the evening Harry Rabjahns, the blacksmith, came to the inn, and Grandfather Derges with him, and they had a mug of cider a-piece. And then, being more than a bit in liquor, but not so far gone as not to know what I was saying, I began to talk to them about my own affairs. I told them nothing about the quarrel with my uncle, but I said what was quite true, that I had no stomach to stay and take labourer's wages in the parish where I should see all day long the land that had been mine and my father's before me, and his father's, further back than the church register goes. Why, the Sidcotes and the Leighans came to Challacombe together—the Sidcotes to Sidcote Farm and the Leighans to Berry Down—as everybody knows, when it was nothing but hillside and forest, with never a house, or a field, or a

church, or anything upon it. Therefore I said I should go away; and it was my purpose to go away that very evening. I should walk to Bovey Tracey, I said; I should take the train to Newton Abbot and so to Bristol, where I should find a ship bound for foreign parts. That was what I said; and, perhaps, it was lucky I said so much. But I don't know, because the verdict of the jury I never heard.

'"Well, Mr. David," says Harry the blacksmith, "you've been an unlucky one, sir, and we wish you better luck where you be going—wherever that may be." And so said Grandfather Derges. And Mrs. Exon must pour out a last glass of brandy-and-water, which I took, though I'd had more than enough already. Then we shook hands and I came away.

''Twas then about eight, and there was a half moon, the night being fine and breezy, and flying clouds in the sky. As I crossed the green, the thought came into my head that I was a fool to go to Bristol when Plymouth and Falmouth were nearer and would suit my purpose better. I could walk to Plymouth easy, and so save the railway money. Therefore, I resolved to change my plan, and, instead of turning to the left by Farmer Cummings', I turned to the right at Ivy Cottage and walked across the churchyard, and took the road which goes over Heytree Down to Widdicombe, and then leads to Ashburton and Totnes.

'It was only a chance, mark you, that I took that road; only a chance. I did not know, and I did not suspect, that my uncle had ridden over to Ashburton after I left him. All a chance it was. I never thought to meet him; and he might have been living till now if it hadn't been for that chance.'

The man who was listening groaned aloud at this point.

'The first two miles of the road is a narrow lane between high hedges. What with the brandy I had taken, and the memory of the morning quarrel, I was in as bad a temper as a man need to be; which was the reason why the Devil took possession of me.

'Presently I passed through Heytree Gate, and so out where the road runs over the open down, and here I began to think—the Devil getting in at my head—what I would do if I had my uncle before me; and the blood came into my eyes, and I clutched the cudgel hard. Who do you think put that thought into my head? The Devil. Why did he put that thought into my head? Because the very man was riding along the road on his way home from Ashburton, and because I was going to meet him in about ten minutes.'

'Why,' asked the German, looking up from the paper, 'why is it that criminals and ignorant people cling so fondly to their Devil?'

As nobody replied, he went on reading.

'I heard the footsteps of his pony, a long way off. I was in the middle of the open road when I heard him open Hewedstone Gate with his hunting-crop and clatter through. I saw him coming along in the moonlight. While he was still a good way off, before I could see his face, I knew who it was by the shape of his shoulders and the way he bent over the pony as he rode. Then I saw his face, and I stood still by the side of the road and waited for him. "Murder him! Murder him!" whispered a voice in my ear. Whose voice was that? The Devil's voice.

'My stick was a thick heavy cudgel with a knob. I grasped it by the end and waited.

'He did not see me. He was looking straight before him, thinking, I suppose, how he had done well to get his nephew out of the way—the nephew he had robbed and ruined. So, as he came up to me, I lifted my arm and struck him on the head once, crying. "Give me back my land, villain!" But I do not know whether he heard me or saw me; for he fell to the ground without a word or a groan.

'He fell, I say, from his pony clean on to the ground, his feet slipping from the stirrups. And there he lay, on the broad of his back—dead.

'He was quite dead. His face was white and his heart had ceased to beat. I stood beside him for an hour, waiting to see if he would recover. I hoped he would; because it is a dreadful thing to think that you have murdered a man, even when you are still hot with rage. If he would only recover a little and sit up, I thought, I should be a happy man.

'But he did not. He lay quite still and cold.

'Then I began to think that if I were caught I should be hanged. Would they suspect me? Fortunately, no one had seen me take that road. I was certain of that, so far, and they thought I had gone to Bovey. I must go away as quickly as I could, and leave no trace or sign that would make them suspect me.

'Then I thought that if I were to rob him people would be less inclined to think of me; because, though I might murder the man who had ruined me, they would never believe that I would rob him.

'I felt in his pockets. There was his watch—no, I would not

touch his watch. There was some loose silver, which I left. There was a bag containing money. I know not how much, but it was a light bag. This I took. Also he had under his arm a good-sized tin box in a blue bag, such as lawyers carry. The box I knew would contain his papers, and his papers were his money. So I thought I would do as much mischief to his property as I could, and I took that box. Then I went away, leaving him there cold and dead, with his white cheeks and gray hair, and his eyes wide open. I felt sick when I looked at those eyes, because they reproached me. I reeled and staggered as I left him, carrying the box with me in its blue bag, and the little bag of money.

'I was not going to walk along the road. That would have been a fool's act. I turned straight off and struck for the open moor, intending to cross Hamil Down, and so, by way of Post Bridge, make for Tavistock and Plymouth. And I remembered a place where the box could be hidden away, a safe place, where no one would ever think of looking for it, so that everybody should go on believing that the old man had been robbed as well as murdered. This place was right over the Down, and on the other side, but it was all on my way to Post Bridge.

'I climbed the hill then and walked across the top of Hamil Down. On the way, I passed the Grey Wether Stone, and I thought I would hide the bag of money in a hole I knew of at the foot of it. Nobody would look for it there. Not twenty people in a year ever go near the Grey Wether. There I put it, and then I walked down the hill on the other side and got to Grimspound, where I meant to hide the other bag with the box in it.

'Tell them, if you ever get away from this awful place, that the box lies on the side nearest Hamil, where three stones piled one above the other make a sort of little cave, where you might think to draw a badger, but which would never make anyone suspect a hiding place. The stones are in the corner, and are the first you come to on your way down. There I put the box, and then I walked away past Vitifer to Post Bridge, and then along the high road to Two Bridges and Tavistock. But I did not stop in Tavistock. Perhaps there would be an alarm. So I went on walking all the way without stopping—except to sit down a bit—to Plymouth. There I got a newspaper; but I could read nothing of the murder. Then I took the train to Falmouth, and waited there for three days, and bought a newspaper every day—one would surely think that a murder in a quiet country place would be reported; but I could find not a single word about my murder.

'Then I was able to take passage on board a German ship bound for New York. I got to New York, and I stayed there till my money was all gone, which did not take long. There I made the acquaintance of some men, who told me to go with them, for they were going West. They were all, I found, men who had done something, and the police were anxious to take them. I never told them what I had done, but they knew it was something, and when they found out that I knew nothing about robbery and burglary, and couldn't cheat at gambling and the like, they set it down that it must be murder. But they cared nothing, and I went along with them.'

'Your confession, my friend,' said the German, stopping at this point, 'of what followed—the horse-stealing adventure, your own escape, and the untimely end of your companions; your honesty in California, and its interruption; your career as a bonnet or confederate; and your experience of a Californian prison—are all interesting, but I cannot waste paper upon them. I return, therefore, to the material part of the confession. And with this I conclude.'

'I desire to state that from the first night that I arrived in New York till now I have every night been visited by the ghost of the man I killed. My uncle stands beside the bed—whether it is in a bed in a crowded room, or on the ground in the open, or in a cabin at sea, or on the deck—whether I am drunk or sober, he always comes every night. His face is white, and the wound in his forehead is bleeding. "Come back to England," he says, "and confess the crime."

'I must go back and give myself up to justice. I will make no more struggles against my fate. But because I am uncertain whether I shall live to get back, and because I know not how to escape from this island, I wish to have my confession written and signed, so that, if I die, the truth may be told.'

Thus ended the paper.

'So,' said the big German, 'you acknowledge this to be your full and true confession?'

'I do.'

'Sign it, then.' He produced from his bag a pencil and gave it to the man, who signed, in a trembling hand, 'David Leighan.' Under the signature the German wrote, 'Witnessed by me, Baron Sergius Von Holsten.'

This done, he replaced the note-book in his wallet.

'The reason why I wanted you to sign the paper to-night,' he

said, 'is that there seems as if there might be a chance of your getting away from the island.'

'How?'

'Look out to sea.'

They were almost at the extreme south point of the island—the maps call it Cape St. George, but what the islanders call it has not yet been ascertained. In the west the shores of New Britain could be seen, because the sun was just sinking behind them; to the south and the east there was open sea.

'I can see nothing.'

'Look through my glass, then.'

'I can see a ship—a two-masted sailing-ship.'

'She is in quest of blackbirds. She will probably send a boat ashore. Fortunately for you, the people are all gone off to fight. You will, therefore, if she does send a boat here, have a chance of getting away. If she sails north, and sends a boat ashore fifty miles or so further up the coast, that boat's crew will be speared, and you will probably see portions of their arms and legs for some little time to come in the huts. Well, my friend'—for the man shuddered and trembled—'better their arms and legs than your own. Yet, see the strange decrees of fate. The men in the boat are very likely no worse than their neighbours. That is to say, they will have done nothing worse than the smaller sins freely forgiven by every tolerant person. They have drunk, fought, sworn, lied, and so forth. But they have not committed murder. Yet they will be speared; while you, thanks to my protection, have hitherto escaped, and may possibly get clear off the island. Yet consider what a sinner—what a sinner and a criminal—you have been. Now, my friend, the sun is about to set. In ten minutes it will be dark, and we have neither candles nor matches. Go to your bed and await the further commands of the Herr Ghost, your respectable uncle. On the eve of your departure, if you are to go to-morrow, he will probably be more peremptory and more terrifying than usual. Do not groan more loudly than you can help, because groans disturb neighbours. Such is the abominable selfishness of the repentant, that their remorse is as great a nuisance to their companions as their crime was an annoyance to their victims. Go to bed, David, and await the Herr Ghost.'

CHAPTER II.

A JONAH COME ABOARD.

'THEN you think,' said the Mate, looking about him with doubt, 'that we shall do no business here?'

He was a young fellow of two-and-twenty or so, a frank and honest-looking sailor, though his business was that of a cunning kidnapper. Perhaps he had not been long enough at it for the profession to get itself stamped upon his forehead. He was armed with a revolver, ready to hand, and a cutlass hanging at his side. Behind him were four sailors, also armed, in readiness for an attack, for Polynesians are treacherous; and in the boat, pulled as near the shore as the shallow water allowed, were two more men, oars out and in their hands, guns at their side, ready to shove off in a moment. But there were no islanders in sight, only these two Europeans: one a tall man of nearly seven feet, dressed in fantastic imitation of the natives; and the other, apparently, an ordinary beachcomber, quite out of luck, ragged, dejected, and haggard. A little way off the land lay the schooner. Her business was to enlist, kidnap, procure, or secure, by any means in the power of the captain and the crew, as many natives as the ship would hold, and to bring them to North Queensland, where they would be hired out to the planters, exactly as the redemptioners were hired out, in the last century, in Maryland and Virginia, to work out their term of service, and, also exactly like the redemptioners, to find that term indefinitely prolonged by reason of debt for tobacco, clothes, rum, and all kinds of things. They would be privileged to cultivate sugar, coffee, and other tropical productions, and to witness, a long way off, the choicest blessings of civilization; they would also be allowed to cheer their souls with the hope of some day returning to their native islands where these blessings have not yet penetrated, and where they would have to live out the remainder of their days in savagery of that deplorable kind which enjoys perpetual sunshine and warmth, with plenty to eat, nothing to wear, and nothing to do. Warmth, food, and rest—for these as a bribe what would not our people resign of their blessings? The clothes they wear? Well, it would be a good exchange, indeed, from their insufficient and ragged clothes in a cold climate, to none at all in a place where

none are wanted. To exchange the food they eat for the food of the South Sea Islander? Well—apart from roasted Brother—it would certainly seem, at first, a change for the better. To exchange work—hard, horrible, unceasing work—for rest? Who would not?—oh! who would not? Free institutions and Socialist clubs for a country with no institutions at all? Why, why is there not an extensive emigration of the Indolent, the Unlucky, and the Out-of-Work for these Fortunate Islands?

'It is an unlucky voyage,' said the Mate, gazing earnestly at the two men before him, whose appearance and the contrast between them puzzled him. 'Two months out and five weeks becalmed; no business done, and the skipper drunk all day long. Say, strangers, how did you come here?'

'For my part,' said the German, 'I am a naturalist. I make the coleoptera my special study. I have, I believe, enriched science with so many rare and previously unknown specimens, if I succeed in getting them to Europe, that my name will be certainly remembered in scientific history as one of those who have advanced knowledge. Can any man ask more?'

'Colly!—colly what?' asked the Mate. 'But never mind your Colly-what's-her-name. How the devil did you get such a rig, man?'

'I am a linguist,' the Baron Sergius Von Holsten went on to explain, 'as well as a naturalist. I therefore learned the language before landing here, having found a native or two of New Ireland in the mission of the Duke of York Island. It is a great thing to know how to talk with these black children. I am also a surgeon and a physician, so that I can heal their wounds and their diseases when they get any. You see, further, that I am bigger than most men. I am also thorough. I adopted their dress—at least, some of it,' he looked complacently at his toga of tapu cloth; 'and, therefore, being able to talk to them, to impress them with my stature, and to cure them, I landed among them without fear. When they came round me with their spears, I shouted to them that I was a great magician, come to their help straight down from the sun. And as I know a little prestidigitation and conjuring, and am a bit of a ventriloquist, I am from time to time able to work a few of the simpler miracles. So that they readily believe me.'

'How long are you going to stay here?'

'I know not; New Ireland is rich in new species; but I shall have to stop as soon as my means of collection and description come

to an end. When that day comes I shall be glad to see a ship. But it will not be yet!'

'They may kill you.'

'It is possible,' the Baron shrugged his tall shoulders; 'they are like little children. It may occur to one of them some day to find out what I should do, and how I should look, if he were to drive his spear into my back. We all run our little dangers, and must not allow them to stop our work.'

The Mate looked doubtful.

'I am also an ethnologist, and I assure you, Lieutenant, that the study of these people is of profound interest.'

'Have you no arms?'

'I have a revolver; but what is one revolver against the spears of a whole people? I have really no other weapon but my power of persuasion, and my reputation for magic and sorcery. These will not fail me, unless, as I said before, one of them may be anxious to see how a god behaves and how he looks with a spear stuck through him.'

'And how do you live?'

'The people bring me food every day. If they did not, I should afflict them with horrible misfortunes, as they very well know. I should tell them that in three days such a one would be dead, and then it would be that man's duty to go away and die, in fulfilment of prophecy. I suppose his friends would never speak to him again if he refused to fulfil the words of the Prophet, so great is their faith. They bring me the unripe cocoanut for its milk; there are fish of every kind in the sea, which they net and spear for me; there are kangaroo and cassowary on the hills, which they snare and trap for me; there are birds, which they shoot for me; there are mangoes, bread-fruit, bananas, yams, sweet potatoes, and taro. I assure you we feed very well. Don't we, David?' He laid his hand on the other man's shoulder. 'We have also tobacco. There is, however—which you regret, David, don't you?—no rum on the island.'

'Is your—your—chum also worshipped?' asked the Mate, regarding David with an obvious decrease of interest.

'No; David is recognised as of inferior clay. This poor fellow was wrecked upon the island; he came ashore on a plank, the rest of the ship's crew and passengers have given indigestion to the sharks. He is not happy here, and he would like you to take him off the island.'

'Yes,' said David eagerly, but still in his slow way, 'anywhere, so that I can only get on my way to England.'

'He was just getting off his plank, and the people were preparing to receive him joyfully, warmly, and hospitably, after their fashion; that is to say, into their pots—they have a beautiful method of cooking, in a kind of sunken pot, which would greatly interest you if you were a captive and expecting your turn—when I fortunately arrived, and succeeded, by promising an eclipse if I was disobeyed, in saving him. The eclipse came in good time; but I had forgiven the people for their momentary mutiny, and I averted its power for evil. So long as David sticks close to me now he is safe. If he leaves me his end is certain. But he is no use to me, and for certain reasons I should very much prefer that he was gone. Will you take him?'

'The ship doesn't carry passengers,' said the Mate; 'besides——'

'He is harmless, and you can trust him not to make mischief. I will pay for him if you like.'

'What does he want to go home for?' asked the Mate doubtfully. Indeed, the appearance of the man did not warrant the belief that he would be welcomed by his friends.

'He has to pay a pilgrimage: he has to deliver a message before a magistrate, and to be subsequently elevated to a post of great distinction,' said the Baron.

'Humph!' said the Mate. 'He looks as if he'd done something. Better keep in these latitudes, stranger; where no one asks and no one cares. But about his fare—who's to pay for his passage and his grub, if we take him?'

'You will return some time to Queensland. Take or send this note.' He took his note-book, tore off half a leaf, and wrote a few words upon it. 'Send this note to Messrs. Hengstenburg and Company, Sydney. Tell them where you got it, and they will give you £20 for it, and will thank you into the bargain for letting them know that, so far, the Baron Sergius Von Holsten is safe. If there is any money left after paying for your passenger, give it to this poor devil. He is not such a bad devil, though he looks so miserable, unless he begins to confide in you. When he does that, lock him up in a cabin. Perhaps he has done something, as you say: what do we know? As for doing things,' he said, regarding his humble companion with the utmost severity, 'a man who is tempted to commit a crime ought always to remember that he will some day, in all probability, be wrecked on a desert island, an island of cannibals, in the company of one, and only one, other

European, and that man greatly his superior; and he ought truly to resolve that under no temptations will he do anything which may make him a nuisance and a bore to that companion through the vehemence of his repentance.' David Leighan groaned. 'Man,' added the Baron sententiously, 'does not live for himself alone; and he who rashly commits a crime may hereafter seriously interfere with the comfort of his brother man.' David hung his head. 'I forgive you, David. I have protected you from the natives' spears and their pots and carving-knives for six months, though it has cost me many foolish threats and vain curses. I have fed you and sheltered you. I have been rewarded by penitential groans and by outward tokens of fervent contrition. These have saddened my days, and have disturbed my slumbers. Groan, henceforth, into other ears. I forgive you, however, only on one condition, that you return no more. If you do, you shall be speared and potted without remorse. As for the document in my note-book——'

'I shall get to England before you,' said David; 'and when I get there, I shall go at once to Challacombe or Moreton and make a statement just like the one you have in your note-book. By the time you come to England, I shall be——'

'Exactly,' said the Baron, smiling sweetly. 'You will have been a public character. Well, to each man comes, somehow, his chance of greatness. I hope you may enjoy your reputation, David, though it may be shortlived.'

The Mate, meantime, was considering the note put into his hands. It was very short, and was a simple draught upon a merchant's house in Sydney—the shortest draught, I suppose, ever written, and on the smallest piece of paper.

'Messrs. Hengstenburg and Co., Sydney. Pay bearer £20. New Ireland. 1884. Baron Sergius Von Holsten.'

'I will take him,' said the Mate. 'The Captain is always drunk, so it is no use waiting to ask him. Most likely he will never know. I expect to be out another three or four months. He can come aboard with me. But, stranger,' he said persuasively, 'can no business be done? Are they open to reason?' He looked round at the forest and the deserted huts. 'Can we trade for a few natives, you and me, between us? Lord! if I could only see my way to persuade 'em to worship me, I'd—blessed if I wouldn't!—I would ship the whole island. There would be a fortune in it.'

'They are open to no reason at all. In fact, if they were at this moment—nothing is more probable—to come down upon us unex-

pectedly, it would be a painful necessity for me—if I valued my reputation as a Prophet—to order them to attack and spear both you and your crew; otherwise, I should be considered a false Prophet, and should pay the penalty in being myself speared and put into these curious large sunken pots in which one lies so snug and warm. They are a bloodthirsty, ferocious race. In their cookery they are curious, as I have already informed you. They are wonderfully handy with their lances, and they move in large bodies. Those pop-guns of yours would knock over two or three, but would be of no avail to save your own lives. Therefore, I would advise that you get into your boat and aboard your ship with as little delay as possible.'

The Mate took his advice, and departed with his passenger.

'And now,' said the Baron Sergius, 'I am alone at last, and can enjoy myself without any of that fellow's groans. I never knew before how extremely disagreeable one single simple murder may make a man.'

* * * * * *

That evening the rescued man, David Leighan, sat on the deck with his friend the Mate. They had a bottle of rum between them and a pannikin apiece. The island of New Ireland was now a black patch low down on the horizon; the night was clear, and the sky full of stars; there was a steady breeze, and the schooner was making her way easily and gently across the smooth water. David was off the island at last, and once more free to return to England, yet he did not look happier; on the contrary, the gloom upon his face was blacker than ever.

'The Skipper,' said the Mate, 'is drunk again. He's been drunk since we sailed out of port. Don't you never ship with a Skipper that is drunk all day long. Once in a way—say of a Saturday night, when a man may expect it—there's no harm done; and not much when the fit takes him now and then in an uncertain way, though it may put the men about more than a bit. Whereas, you see, the Captain has got the owners' private instructions—those which they don't write down. He knows how far he may go with the natives, and where he's to draw the line. So that if he's always drunk, what is the Mate to do? Either he may take the ship home again and report his own Captain, in which case he makes enemies for life, and may never get a berth again, or he may fill his ship with goods in the easiest way they can be got, which, I needn't tell you, mate, is a rough way. And when he gets back to port, what is to prevent some of his men from rounding on that Mate?

Then all the blame falls on him, and he is prosecuted, because it will be shown in evidence that the Captain was drunk all the time. Either way, therefore, the Mate gets the worst of it. Sometimes I think it would be best for him to join the Captain. Then the command would devolve upon the bo's'n, and how he'd get *his* goods everybody knows.'

The officer was loquacious, and talked on about his trade and its difficulties, not at first observing that his companion took no interest in it.

'Seems as if you're sorry you've left the island,' he said presently, remarking a certain absence of sympathy.

'I wish I had stayed there,' said David, with a groan. 'There at least I was safe, except for the—the thing at night; whereas, if I get back to England, supposing I ever do——' here he stopped.

'If you've done something, man, what the devil do you want to go back to England for?'

'Because I must. There's ropes pulling me back, and yet there's something that always stops me. I was going home from Brisbane, but the ship was wrecked. That is how I got on New Ireland. Before that, I was travelling down to Melbourne to get a passage from there, but the train was smashed, and I had three months in hospital and spent all my money. I dare say something will happen to this ship. She'll run on a rock or capsize, or something.'

The Mate made no reply for a little. He was superstitious, like all sailors. Just then the drunken Captain began to sing at the top of his voice. It was a sound of ill-omen. The Mate shuddered, and took another sip of the rum.

'Man,' he said, 'I don't like it. If the crew had heard them words, they'd have had you overboard in a minute. Don't tell me they wouldn't, because they would, and think nothing of it. This is a voyage where we want all the luck we can get; not to have our honest endeavours thwarted by such an unlucky devil as yourself. Well, I won't tell them. But keep a quiet tongue in your head. And now go below and turn in.'

Later on, the Mate was able to turn in for an hour. His passenger was sitting up in bed, remonstrating with some invisible person.

'I am going home,' he said, 'as fast as I can go. Leave me in peace. I am going home, and I will confess everything.'

The Mate asked him what he was doing, but received no answer, for the man had fallen back upon the pillow and was fast asleep. He had been talking in his sleep.

'I'll put him ashore,' said the Mate, 'at the first land we make where he won't be eaten by cannibals. I believe he's committed a murder.'

The next day, and the next, and for many days the vessel sailed among the islands of the Southern Seas. But David grew daily more miserable and more despondent; his face looked more haggard, and his eyes became more hollow. He was dismal when sober, and despairing when drunk. The Mate left him now altogether alone, and none of the ship's company, who regarded him with doubtful, if not unfriendly eyes, spoke to him. So that he was able to revel in the luxury of repentance, and to taste beforehand, in imagination, the pleasures of the atonement which awaited him.

It proved a most unlucky voyage. They lost two men in an encounter with the natives; they had no success in trading; the Captain continued to drink, and the Mate wished devoutly that the cruise was finished and the ship back in port, if only to have done with a voyage which he foresaw would continue as it had begun.

The end came unexpectedly.

One night the watch on deck were startled by a bright light in the Captain's cabin. The light shot into a flame, and the flame leaped and ran along the sides of the cabin and caught the deck and licked the timbers of the ship. The old schooner was as dry as tinder, and caught fire like a piece of paper. In five minutes it became apparent that they must take to their boats. This they did, having just time to put in a little water and some provisions. As to the drunken man who had done the mischief, he came out of the burning cabin and danced and sang until the flames dragged him down.

In the fierce glare of the burning ship, the Mate looked at David reproachfully, implying that this misfortune was entirely due to his presence.

'Even now,' he whispered, 'I will not tell the men you have ruined the voyage, burned the ship, killed the Captain, and maybe killed us as well. What have you done that we should be punished like this for taking you on board? Is it—is it murder?'

David nodded his head gloomily.

'Then,' said the Mate, 'whatever happens to us, you'll get safe ashore. You won't be drowned and you won't be starved.'

Three weeks later there were only two survivors in that boat. The other men had all drunk sea-water, and so gone mad one after the other, and leaped overboard in their delirium. Only David

Leighan was left with the Mate, and they were lying one in the bows and one in the stern, as far apart as the boat would allow, and they were black in the face, gaunt, and hollow-eyed.

When they were picked up, the signs of life were so faint in them that the Skipper, a humane person, took counsel with his Mate, whether it would not save the poor men trouble to drop them into the water at once. But in the end, as there was just the least and faintest pulse possible, he hoisted them aboard and laid them on the deck, with their heads propped up. Then, the ship having no doctor aboard, he began to administer whisky and rum in alternate spoonfuls, so that the dying men got so drunk that they could no longer die with any dignity. They therefore recovered, and sat up, gazing about them with rolling heads and vacuous eyes. Then they fell back, and went sound asleep for six hours. At the end of this time the misery of the long fasting began again with pangs intolerable. But the Captain rose to the occasion. Pea-soup, also exhibited in spoonfuls, proved a specific. Next day they had boiled pork; and the day after, sea-pie. Now, the man who can eat sea-pie can eat anything. The two survivors of the unlucky schooner were once more well and hearty.

For the rest of the voyage the rescued Mate kept aloof from the rescued passenger. He would not speak to him; he avoided that part of the ship where he happened to be. As for the latter, he found a place abaft, near the helm, where he could sit upon a coil of rope, his head upon his knees. And there he remained, gloomy and silent.

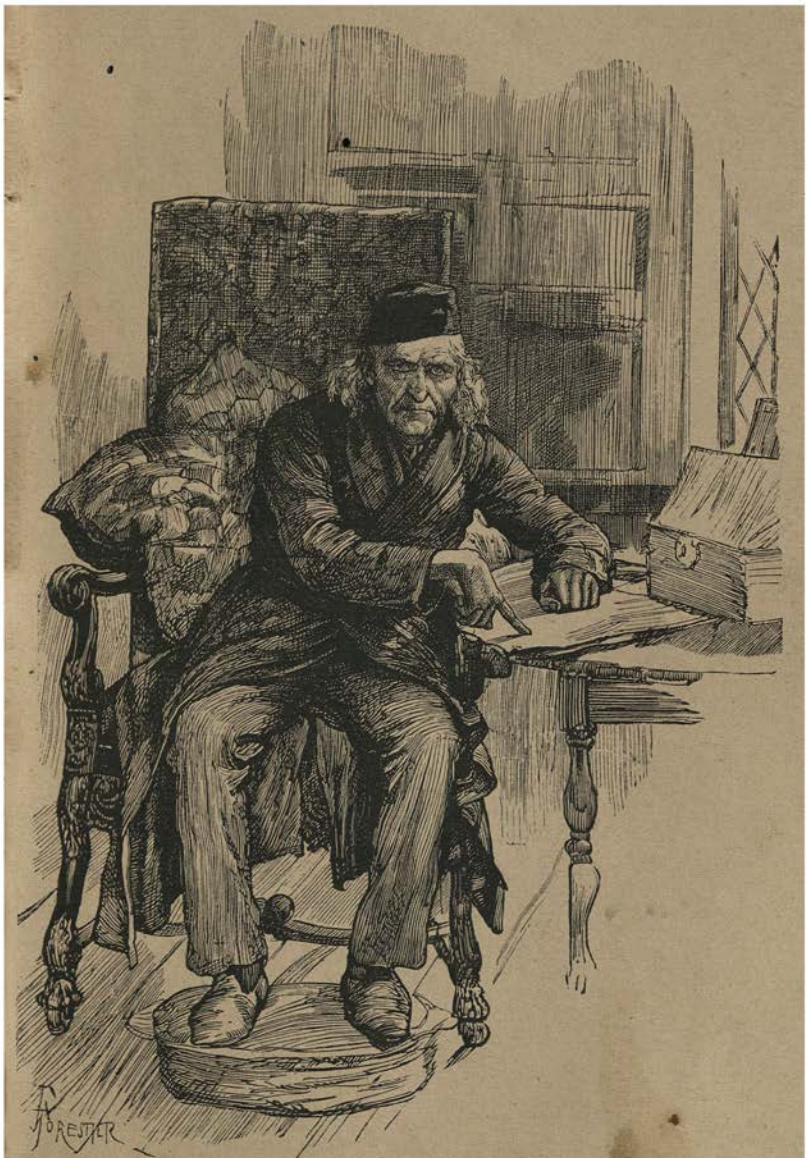
There was trouble, too. First the ship sprang a leak, and the pumps had to be worked. Next, there was a bad storm, and the mizen-mast went by the board. Thirdly, a fire broke out, and was subdued with difficulty. However, the ship at last sighted land, and arrived, battered and shattered, at the port of Sydney.

When they landed, and not till then, the rescued Mate spoke his mind.

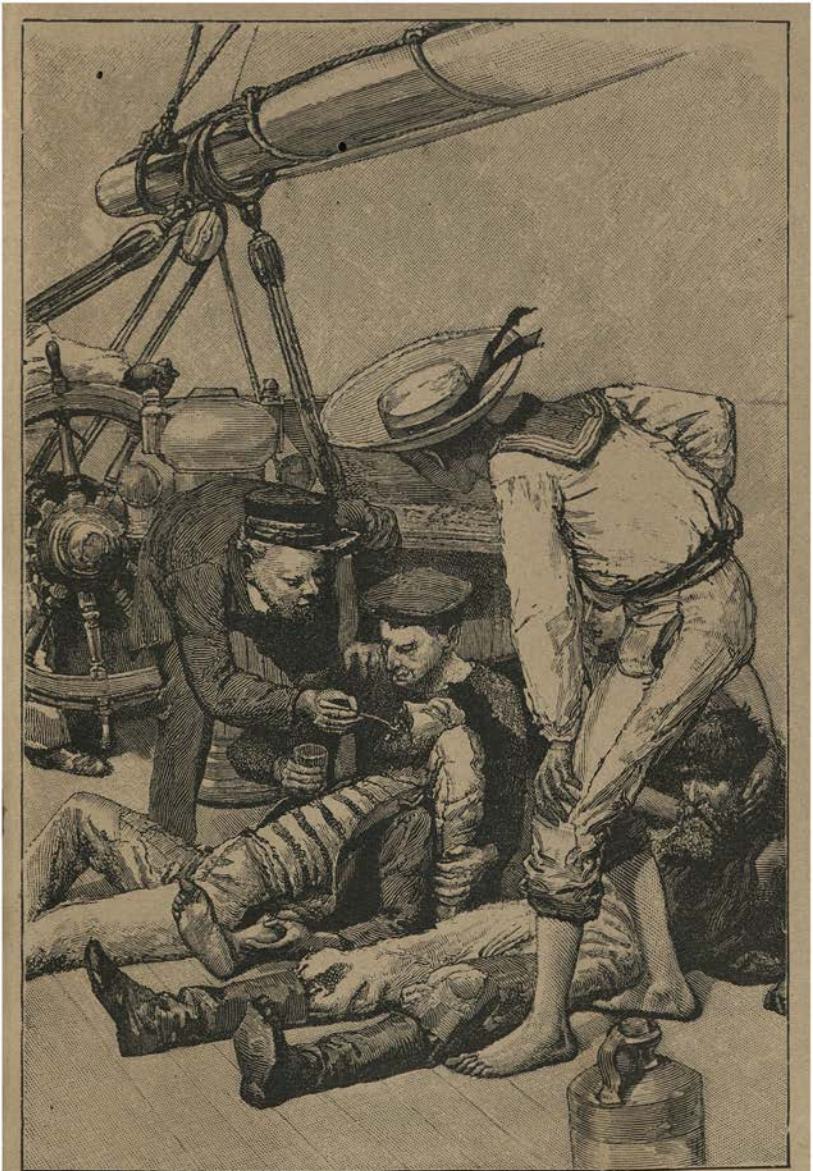
First he went to the house of Hengstenburg and Co., where he presented the Baron's draught, gave news of his safety, and touched the money. He then led his passenger to a drinking-saloon, and entered into a serious conversation with him.

'As for this money,' he said, 'you weren't a passenger more than a few days, and I can't rightly charge you much. Take fifteen, and I'll take five. With fifteen pounds you can get home, which I take to be your desire, and give yourself up, which I take to be your duty.' It will be understood that the unfortunate David

'THE GIRL WHO SAT WORKING AT THE OPEN WINDOW WAS MARY NETHERCOTE.'



'OLD DAN WAS NOW WHITE-HAIRED, AND ADVANCED IN YEARS.



'THE SHIP HAVING NO DOCTOR ABOARD, HE BEGAN TO ADMINISTER WHISKY AND RUM IN ALTERNATE SPOONFULS.'

in the extremity of his starvation and remorse had been talking.

'A Providence it is,' said the Mate, 'that where so many honest fellows were took, I was spared; else you would never have had this money, and you wouldn't therefore have been able to give yourself up, and you would never have been hung. A clear Providence it is; and you must regard it as such, and remember it when they take you out, comfortably, with the chaplain and the rope.'

David took the money, rolled it up in a rag, and placed it in his pocket; but said nothing.

'I don't want,' continued the Mate, 'to hurt your feelings; but, if you can, go home on a raft by yourself; for, being a Jonah——'

'What is a Jonah?'

'Being a Jonah, in a whale's belly, it would be kind and considerate and might save many valuable lives. As for me, I don't mind owning up, that if I was to find myself aboard with you again, after all I've gone through, and you carrying about wherever you go an infernal, invisible ghost and talking and confessing to him every night—I say, if I was to find myself aboard with you again, I'd get into the dingy and row ashore by myself—I would, if it was in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.'

David groaned.

Then the Mate moralized upon the situation. Strange to say, he took something of the line previously taken by Baron Sergius.

'One fine ship wrecked, and all her crew, for aught I know, cast away; another tight schooner burnt and the Captain and all the crew killed, except you and me; and a third ship half burned and brought water-logged into port—and all along of you! Blow me! if you'd knifed a Bishop there couldn't have been more fuss made! I won't reproach you, my lad, because you've got your ghost to do that every night, and because you've got to face the racket of the chaplain and the rope and the long drop; but, considering the mischief you've done, I wish to put it to you, that what you've done was a beastly selfish thing to do.'

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST DREAM.

At half-past four exactly, Mr. Leighan, of Gratnor, commonly called Daniel Leighan, or Old Dan, or Mr. Daniel, according to the social position of those who spoke of him, awoke with a start from his afternoon nap. Mr. Leighan always took his dinner at one; after his dinner, he took a tumbler of brandy-and-water hot, with two lumps of sugar and a slice of lemon—as his grandfather had done before him, only that the ancestral drink was rum, and the brew was called "punch." With the glass of brandy-and-water he took a pipe of tobacco. This brought him, regularly and exactly, to half-past two. He then knocked out the ashes, laid down his pipe, pulled his silk handkerchief over his head—which kept off the draught in winter and flies in summer—and went to sleep till half-past four, when he woke up and had his tea. This was his way of spending the afternoon. He had never varied that way, even when he was a young man and active; and now he would never attempt to vary it, for he was old and paralyzed; and he passed his days wholly sitting in a high-backed arm-chair, with pillows and cushions at the back and sides, and a stool for his feet. From eight in the morning until nine in the evening he lived in that chair and in that room. There was always a wood fire burning in the grate, even on such a hot summer day as this; for Challacombe is a thousand feet above the level of the sea, and the clouds roll up the valleys of the Teign and the Bovey from the sea, or they roll down from the Tors and the Downs, and envelop it; so that half the year one lives in cloud. This makes it a damp and trying air, so that the domestic hearth at Challacombe is like the Altar of Vesta, being never quenched even in July and August.

Old Dan—we all belong, I am sure, to the upper circles, and can, therefore, permit ourselves this familiarity—was now white-haired, and advanced in years; but not so old as he looked by a good many years. His locks were long, but, though certainly impressive, they did not, as in another and a famous historical case, cause him, therefore, to look benevolent. Perhaps this was because he wore a black skull-cap: a thing which, like a biretta, generally causes its wearer to appear bereft of all charity, meekness, tenderness, and

brotherly love. A black skull-cap is even said to have a really malignant influence as regards these virtues. Perhaps, however, no artifice or invention of science could make that face look benevolent. In youth, before its features were sharpened and stiffened, it must have been a singularly handsome and striking face. It was now a masterful and self-willed face. The nose was long and hooked, the forehead high and narrow, the chin sharp, and the mouth square; any one of these points may indicate self-will, but, taken all together, they bawl it aloud. If his eyes were open, as they will be in a moment, you would say that they must have been beautiful in youth, when their bright blue was set off by the brown hair; now, after seventy years of greed and avarice, they were hard and keen, but as bright as ever—even brighter than in youth, because they were set off by thick white eyebrows like a pent-house. Before his affliction fell upon him he was taller than the generality of men. Even now, when he sat upright in his chair, he produced the same impression of great height which he had formerly been used to exercise when he stood half a foot or so above any man with whom he was conversing. Great stature, properly used, is a wonderful help to personal influence. Too often, however, it is, considered as a means of self-advancement, a gift clean thrown away. It was not, in short, a common face which one looked at in that chair, nor a common figure. Any candid person—that is to say, any man who had never had business relations with Mr. Leighan, and might, therefore, be reasonably free from the vindictiveness and rage which blinded the eyes of his tenants, debtors, and dependents—would allow this to be the face of a man originally intended by Nature to make a mark in the great world, if he should get the chance. He never did get that chance, and his abilities had been expended in the interesting and absorbing, though petty, business of over-reaching neighbours not so clever as himself, extorting the uttermost farthing, and adding bit by bit to his property. He was now the rich man of a parish in which there was no Squire; he was the village miser; he was the terror of those who owed him money; he was the driver of the hardest bargains; he was the strong and masterful man; he was the scourge of the weak and thriftless; he was the tyrant of the village. He knew all this, and, so far from being humiliated, he enjoyed the position; he exulted in the consciousness of his own unpopularity; he alone in the parish had risen among his fellows to the proud distinction of being universally detested. Men like David Leighan love the power which such a position means; they

even think of themselves complacently as wolves lying in ambush to rush upon the unwary, and to rend and devour the feeble.

The girl who sat working at the open window was his niece, Mary Nethercote. That is to say, the work lay in her lap; but her hands were idle, and her eyes were far away from the sewing. She lived with Daniel, and took care of him. He railed at all the world except her; he quarrelled with all the world except his niece; and those persons who averred that he was kind to her because he had the keeping of her money and took all the interest for himself, and had her services as housekeeper for nothing, were perhaps only imperfectly acquainted with the old man's motives and his feelings. Yet the statement was true. He did have the keeping of her money—a good lump of money; and he did give himself the interest in return for her board and lodging; and he did have her services as housekeeper for nothing.

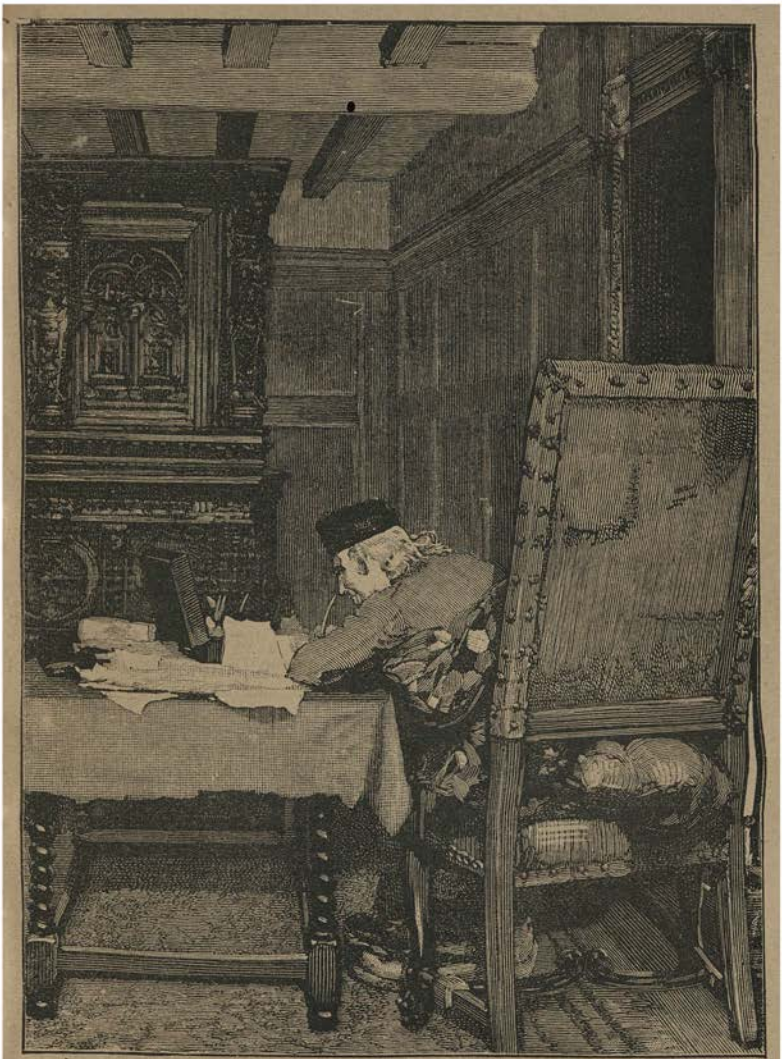
I declare that when one considers such a girl as Mary Nethercote, and thinks how helpful she is, how unselfish, how ready at all times to spend and be spent in the service of others; how full she is of the old-fashioned learning which the homestead gives to the happiness of material comfort; how little she thinks about herself; how simple she is in her tastes, and yet how sweet and dainty and lovely to look upon, one is carried away with gratitude and admiration. What, one asks at such a moment, is the wisdom of Girton and Newnham compared with the wisdom of the farmer's daughter? What! in fact, can the Girton girl make? Doth she solace the world and profit her kind by her triple integrals? Doth she advance mankind by her cherished political economy? Mary, for her part, keeps the fowls and ducks; Mary considers the fattening of the geese and the welfare of the turkeys; Mary looks after the dairy; Mary superintends the baking of the wholesome and sweet home-made bread under the red pots; the confecting of puddings, pies, tarts, and cakes; the boiling and skimming and potting of the most beautiful jams and jellies; Mary conducts the garden, both that of flowers and that of vegetables—there is, in fact, only one garden, and the flowers flourish in the borders beside the onions and the peas; Mary directs the brewing of the cider; Mary keeps the keys, and "gives out" the linen; Mary inspects the washing and the ironing: in short, Mary "openeth her mouth with wisdom, and looketh well to the ways of her household." She is up at five in summer and at six in winter; all the morning she is at work with her maids; in the afternoon she takes her needle and sews; in the evening she plays and sings

a little, to keep her uncle in good temper, and sometimes reads a novel for an hour before she goes to bed. This is her life. Sometimes there may be a tea-drinking. Sometimes she will mount her pony and ride over to Newton Abbot, to Moreton Hampstead, or to Ashburton, where the shop-people all know her, and are pleased to see her. But mostly, from week to week, she stays at home. As for a summer holiday, that is a thing which has never entered into her mind. The girl-graduate, perhaps, scorns the work of the household. I, for my part, do not scorn the work of the farmer, whose work exactly corresponds to that of Mary. It seems to me a better and a happier life, in and out of house and barn, and linney, and dairy, in the open air, warmed by the sun, beaten by every wind that blows, breathing the sweet smells of newly-turned earth, of hedge and ditch, and the wild-flowers, than any that can be found in the study and at the desk.

The maids of Devon are, we know, fair to outward view as other maidens are, and perhaps fairer than most; though in so delicate a matter as beauty, comparisons are horrid. Some there are with black hair and black eyes. These must be descended from the ancient Cornish stock, and are cousins of those who still speak the Celtic tongue across the Channel. But there is talk of the Spanish prisoners who had no desire to go home again, but settled in Devon and Cornwall, and became Protestants in a land where there was no Inquisition. Others there are who have brown hair and blue eyes. Mary came of this stock. Her eyes, like her uncle's, were blue, but they were of a deeper blue; and they were soft, while his were hard. Her hair was a rich, warm brown, and there was a lot of it. When all is said, can there be a better colour for hair and eyes? As for her face, I do not claim, as the Americans say, for Mary that she was a stately and statuesque beauty; nor had she the least touch of style and fashion—how should she have? But for sweetness, and the simple beauty of regular features, rosy lips, bright eyes, and healthy cheek, lit up with the sunshine of love and truth, and coloured with the bloom of youth, there are few damsels, indeed, who can compare with Mary Nethercote, of Gratnor Farm. As for her figure, it was tall and well-proportioned, full of health and yet not buxom. Need one say more? Such was Mary in the summer of the year 1886; nay, such she is now, as you may see in Challacombe Church, where she still sits in her old place with the choir, beside George Sidcote. Many things—of which I am the historian—have happened since the summer of last year; but Mary's place in church is not changed, nor has the bloom of her

beauty left her cheek :—many things, as you shall learn, with many surprises and great changes ; yet methinks her face is happier and more full of sunshine now than it was twelve months ago.

The room in which she sat was low and long : it was an old-fashioned wainscoted room, rather dark, because it was lit by one window only, and because a great branch of white roses was hanging over the window, broken from its fastenings by the wind, or by the weight of its flowers. It had a south aspect, which in winter made it warm ; its chief article of furniture, because it was always in one place and took up so much room, was Mr. Leighan's arm-chair, which stood so that his back was turned to the light. This prevented him from looking out of the window, but it enabled him to read and write and pore over his papers. The best scenery in the eyes of Mr. Leighan was the sight of a mortgage or a deed of conveyance. As for the sunshine outside—the flowers, and the view of hill and vale and wood—he cared naught for these things. There were, besides, two or three ordinary chairs—Mary had never enjoyed the luxury of an easy-chair or a sofa—there was a small work-table for her 'things,' and there was a really splendid old cabinet, black with age, wonderful with carvings, for which Wardour Street would sigh in vain ; in fact, the reputation of that cabinet had gone abroad, and overtures had been made again and again for its purchase. And the contents ! Your heart would sink with the sickness of longing only to look upon them. There were old brass candlesticks, old silver candlesticks, brass and silver snuffers and snuffer-trays ; silver cups of every size, from the little christening-cup to the great silver whistle-cup holding a quart and a half ; there were punch-bowls and ladles ; and there was old china—yea, china which would move a collector to sighs and sobs of envy. These things represented many generations of Leighans, who had been settled in Challacombe since that parish began to exist. It is now five hundred years since their ancestors moved up from the lowlands to the hillsides and combes on the fringe of the Moor. It was about the time when the Yorkists and Lancastrians were chopping and hacking at one another, though no report of the battles came up here for many a month after the event, that the church was built. Civil wars, indeed, never caused any broils at Challacombe : the Reformation found the people obedient ; Queen Mary burned none of them, for they were easily reconverted ; and Queen Bess found them docile to the royal supremacy. The only enthusiasm they were ever known to show was a hundred years after Queen Bess's time, when King Monmouth rode across the West



'IT WAS AN OLD-FASHIONED WAINSCOTED ROOM; AND THERE WAS A REALLY SPLENDID OLD CABINET, BLACK WITH AGE, WONDERFUL WITH CARVINGS.'

country to try his fate at Sedgemoor. One of the younger Leighans, a hot blood, who heard of his landing when at Ashburton on market-day, so far forgot the family traditions as to gallop over to Torquay and shout for the new King, and rode in his train, and did his share of the fighting. More lucky than his companions, he found his way home, and went on farming—'twas John Leighan of Foxworthy—as if nothing had happened, and nobody afterwards troubled him. In this great cabinet were kept the treasures of all those generations—about fifteen in number—who now lie—fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters—in the green churchyard of Challacombe. Daniel Leighan, the owner of the cabinet, thought himself a warm man; but his warmth, in his own mind, consisted of his fields and his investments: he little knew or suspected how valuable were those treasures in his cabinet.

There were pictures on the walls—coloured engravings and mezzotints of the last century. I take it that Art, in the form of pictures, did not reach the Devonshire farm earlier than the year 1750, or thereabouts. On the mantelshelf were certain china vases which caused anguish to the critical soul: they dated from 1820, I think. Above the vases were old-fashioned samplers in frames, things which made one babble of Madame Barbauld, Mrs. Trimmer, and Joanna Baillie. I don't know why—because I never saw any of Mrs. Barbauld's samplers, or those of the other ladies.

A piano stood at the wall laden with songs and music—not, I fear, of the highest classical kind, for Mary's school at Newton Abbot, where she had spent two long years, knew little of classical music. Will Nethercote—I who write this story am that Will—sent her the songs from London, and George Sidcote bought her the music at Newton or at Teignmouth. There was also a shelf of books; but these were even less successful, from the classical point of view, than the music. For they consisted of novels, also given by this London person, and of pretty books bought for her in their boyish days by George Sidcote, and if we just hint that the leading bookseller of Bovey is apparently—to judge by the works laid out upon his shelves—under the influence of two young men who wear broad hats and flopping skirts, and talk loud as they walk in the streets, and profess a longing to restore Church discipline, you will understand how satisfying to the imagination these books were. Mary reproached herself for liking the works of Mrs. Oliphant, Thomas Hardy, and Wilkie Collins—those quite mundane persons—better than these gaudy volumes.

She was dressed for the afternoon in a pink chintz, with a pink-

and-white-flowered apron, of the kind which covers the whole front of the dress; round her neck she had a white lace ruffle. All the morning she had been at work about the house and the poultry-yard, yet now she looked as if she had not done a stroke of hard work all day, so cool, so quiet, and so dainty was she to look upon. Her hands—not, to be sure, so white and so small as those of a countess—were brown, but not coarse; and her face, though she was out in all weathers, was not burnt or freckled. Yet in her eyes there was a world of trouble. She was troubled for others, not for herself; she was suffering, as some women suffer all their lives, from the dangers which hung over and threatened her lover. You will find out, presently, that these were very real and terrible dangers, and that his life, and therefore hers, was menaced with shipwreck, imminent and unavoidable.

Daniel Leighan awoke at half-past four. Generally, the waking from an afternoon nap is a gentle and a gradual process: first a roll of the head, then a half opening of the eyes, next a movement of the feet and hands, before full life and consciousness return. This afternoon Daniel Leighan, who had been sleeping quite peacefully and restfully, awoke suddenly with a cry, and sat upright in his chair, clutching the arms, his eyes rolling in horror and amazement.

'Mary!' he cried; and then the horror passed out of his face, and his eyes expressed wonder and bewilderment only.

The girl, who was sitting at the window, work in hand, was at his side in a moment.

'Mary!' he gasped and panted, and his words came painfully, 'I saw him—I saw him—the man who robbed me. I saw him plain—and I have forgotten—I have forgotten! It was—oh! I knew just now—I have forgotten, Mary!'

'Patience, uncle; patience.' Mary patted and smoothed the pillows into their places. 'Another time you will remember; you are sure to remember, if the dream only comes again. Lie down again and think.'

He obeyed, and she covered his head again with his silk handkerchief, which sometimes soothes into slumber if the silk is soft enough. He had started from his sleep, as if stung into wakefulness by the recollection of something horrible and painful; and his dream had vanished from his memory, leaving not a trace behind. With such trouble did King Nebuchadnezzar awake, to find his dream unintelligible; but the terror left—and the foreboding. Mary saw the terror; but she knew nothing of the

foreboding. Yet her uncle's mind was filled with anxious fears springing out of this vision. She saw the rolling eyes, the clutching of the chair-arms, and the look of bewilderment; but she only thought her uncle was startled, like a child, in his sleep, and crying out, like a child, for help when there was no danger. He lay still for a few moments while she stood beside him and watched. Then he tore off the handkerchief and sat up again.

'It is quite gone,' he said in despair: 'I have lost the clue. Yet I saw him—oh! I saw him, clear and distinct—the man who robbed me. And while I was going to cry out his name—just as I had his name upon my lips—I awoke and forgot him.'

'If it comes again,' said Mary, incredulous in spite of her words, 'you will be sure to remember. Perhaps it will come again. Patience, uncle.'

'Patience! when I had the clue? Patience! when I could follow up the robber and tear my papers out of his hands. Patience!—don't be a fool, Mary!'

'Well, uncle, if it has gone, and you can't bring it back again, try to forget that it ever came: that is the wisest thing to do. You shall have your tea, and then you will feel better.'

'Mary'—he turned to her piteously—'it is cruelly hard. Can't *you* remember? Think. Perhaps I talked in my sleep—some men do. Have you never heard me say anything—call someone by name? If I had only the least little clue, I should remember.'

'Why, uncle, how should I remember?'

'It came back to me—all so clear—so clear and plain. And I have forgotten. Oh! Mary, my money—my money!'

'Yes, uncle. But it is six years ago, nearly, and you have done very well since. And it is not as if you had lost all your money. Why, you have prospered while all the rest have been doing so badly. You must think of that.'

'Lost all my money?' he repeated testily; 'of course I've not lost all. As if a man could bear to lose a single penny of the money that he has spent his life in saving. Do you know what I have lost, girl?' She knew very well, because he told her every day. 'There were bonds and coupons in the bag to the sum of near upon a hundred and fifty pounds a year—nearly three thousand pounds they meant. As for the share certificates, they didn't matter; but coupons—coupons, Mary; do you hear?—payable only to the bearer—a hundred and fifty pounds a year—a hundred and fifty pounds a year!—near three thousand pounds!——' His voice rose to a shriek, and suddenly dropped again to a moan.

'Three thousand pounds! Payable to the bearer, and I haven't got them to present! If I were a young man of thirty I might recover the loss; but I am old now, and I can never hope to make it up—never hope to make it up again!'

It was six years since that loss had occurred; but this wail over the lost money was raised nearly every day, and almost in the same words, so that the girl felt little sympathy now with the bereavement of her uncle.

'It was six o'clock when I left Ashburton.' The girl had also heard this story so often that her interest in the details had become numbed. 'Six o'clock when I started to ride home. I had seventy pounds in gold upon me: fifty pounds in one bag and twenty in another; my tin box in a blue bag was round my neck, and it was filled with securities and bonds and share certificates. "Better leave 'em here, Mr. Leighan," said Fennell, the bank manager. I wish I had! I wish I had, Mary! But I was headstrong, and would have everything in my own strong-box under my own eye. So I refused, and rode off with them. At half-past seven—it was dark then—I rode into Widdicombe. There I pulled up. I well remember that I stopped there and had a glass of brandy-and-water. It was brandy-and-water hot; and they tried to make it weak, but I wouldn't be cheated. And then I rode on. I remember riding on. And then—then——' At this point he paused, because here his brain began to wander, and his memory played him tricks.

'At Widdicombe, uncle, you must have paid somebody twenty pounds and left your bag of papers; and now you can't remember who it was.'

'No, child; no. I paid away no money at all in Widdicombe, except fourpence for the brandy-and-water. Why should I? There was nothing owing to anybody. Why should I leave a box full of securities and bonds in the hands of anyone when I refused to leave them in the bank? Was I ever a foolhardy person, that I should trust anybody with property of that kind?'

'No,' said Mary. 'It is difficult to understand why you should do so.'

'The landlady—she's a respectable widow woman, and it's only right that she should be near with her brandy—she bears me out. She remembers my paying the fourpence and riding away. After that I remember nothing. Why have I forgotten the ride through the lanes under Honeybag? Why don't I remember passing through Hewedstone Gate to the open down? Yet I remember nothing

more. Mind you, I won't have it said in my hearing that I ever gave anybody anything or that I left my bag lying about like a fool. Yet, when George Sidcote picked me up, the bag was gone, and twenty pounds had gone, too—twenty pounds!'

'Well, but, uncle, consider: you had seventy pounds in gold in your purse, and only twenty were taken. If it had been a thief he would surely have taken the whole, and your loose silver as well as your watch and chain. Why, all those were left.'

'I don't know. Perhaps he thought the bag of papers would satisfy him. How do I know? What made me fall off the pony? I never fell off the pony before. If I was Balaam I would make that old pony tell me who found me lying in the road and robbed me. Fell off the pony!—how in the world did I come to fall off the pony? I wasn't drunk, girl; nobody ever saw Daniel Leighan drunk. I wish I was Balaam—I wish I was—just for five minutes—to have a few words with the pony.'

'You *must* have given the twenty pounds to somebody in Ashburton or Widdicombe, with the bag of papers. Everybody says so.'

'I didn't, then! I felt the bag round my neck when I rode out of Widdicombe—the bag round my neck, and the money in my pocket. Do you think I should not remember if I had paid away twenty pounds—twenty pounds!—do you think I shouldn't have taken a receipt, and the bill and the receipt both in my pocket? Twenty pounds—twenty pounds!—one would think the sovereigns grew in the hedge like the roses.'

'Well, uncle, but think: every day you trouble your poor head about it, and nothing comes of it; why not try to forget the loss? Think what a prosperous man you have been all your life. Think what your property is now, though you began with only one farm: money in the bank, and money invested and all; everybody talking about your good fortune. You should be thinking of what you have, not what you have lost.'

'Go on; go on. Easy for a girl like you to talk. There's that difference with a woman that she only enjoys the spending; while a man——' he heaved a deep sigh, and did not complete the sentence. 'Oh! Mary,' he reached out his long bony fingers and made as if he were raking in the gold, 'to think—only to think!—of the pleasure I have had in making the money! It was little by little, not all at once. No, no; I saw my way, and I waited. I laid my plans, and I had patience. Be sure that not a field have I got but I worked and planned for it. The world is full of fools: weak

men who have no business with property; men without grip; men who just hold on till somebody comes and gives 'em a shove off. Your cousin David was such a fool, Mary.'

Mary said nothing. Her cousin David was doubtless a great fool, but people said unkind things about her uncle's conduct towards him.

'If I had not secured his property someone else would. It is still in the family, which ought to be a great comfort to him, wherever he has gone. George Sidcote is another—well, he isn't exactly a fool, like David; but he doesn't get on—he doesn't get on. I fear very much——'

'Uncle, spare him!'

'Because he wants to marry you, child! Is that a reason for interfering with the course of business? When the pear is ripe it will drop!—if not into my mouth into some other man's. Business before love, Mary.'

'If I could give him my fortune he would be out of his difficulties.'

'Your fortune, Mary? Where is it? What fortune? You have none unless you marry with my consent. Your fortune? Why, it depends upon me whether you ever get it. I don't say that I shall never consent. Show me the right man—not a spendthrift, Mary.'

'George is no spendthrift.'

'Nor a sporting and betting man.'

'George is not a sporting and betting man.'

'Nor a man in debt.'

'If George is in debt it is not his fault.'

'A substantial man, and one who knows the worth of money; bring that man along, and we will see. If not—well, Mary, I am getting on for seventy, and I can't last for ever, and perhaps—perhaps, I say—I shall leave you my money when I die. You can wait till then. Six thousand pounds is a tremendous great lump to part with, when a man is not obliged to part with it. And I am not obliged to give my consent. No, no; and after I've lost three thousand—three thousand! Besides, you're comfortable here: what do you want to marry for? what's the good of marrying? Better stay at home and save money. I give you your board and your lodging, Mary, while you are here, for nothing; and your clothing, too—yes; your clothing.' He spoke as if many young people had to go without.

Mary interrupted with a little laugh.

'Yes, uncle, I know.' She laughed, thinking how much her uncle had given her for dress in the last year or two. Now, since a girl may make up her own things, but cannot very well make the chintz, cambric, and stuff itself, gossiping people often wondered how Mary managed to dress so well and prettily. Perhaps the fowls helped her, or the pigs.

'Well, uncle, but if I do marry without your consent, you will have to give the money to my cousin David.'

'Yes, yes; of course. What's the good of telling me that? But David is dead, no doubt, by this time; and then the money must remain with me, of course'—the will did not say so. 'But you won't do that, Mary; you'll never be so wicked as to do that. Besides, if you did, David's accounts with me have never been made up—that is, properly made up—and I don't doubt that when we come to look into them it will be found that he owes me a great deal still—a great deal of money still. I was very soft—foolishly soft—with David.'

Mary made no reply. Her uncle had been, indeed, soft with David; so soft that he had sold him up, and turned him out, and now possessed his land.

Mr. Leighan sighed heavily, no doubt over his foolish softness, and became silent. It was not often that he talked so much with his niece.

Six years before this, about half-past nine one evening in the autumn of the year 1880, George Sidcote, walking home, found Mr. Leighan lying in the middle of the road on Heytree Down. His pony was grazing quietly beside him, close to the road, and he was lying on his back senseless, with an ugly wound in his head, the scar of which would never leave him. He had fallen, apparently, from his pony, and, as farmers do not generally get such ugly falls when they ride home at night, the general conclusion was that he must have been drunk to fall so heavily, and to fall upon his head. No suspicion of violence or robbery was entertained: first, because no one ever heard of violence at Challacombe; and, secondly, because he had not, apparently, been robbed. So, at least, it seemed to those who carried him home, for his pockets were full of money, and his watch and chain had not been taken.

For three days and three nights Daniel Leighan lay speechless and senseless, and but for a faint pulse he seemed dead. When he recovered consciousness, the first questions he asked were concerning a certain tin box containing papers, which he declared was hanging in a bag from his neck. Now, of that tin box no one knew

anything. Presently, when he counted his money, he swore that he was twenty pounds short.

I am sorry to say that no one believed him. That is to say, there was no doubt that he had taken that box from the bank, because the manager knew of it. But in his drunken fit—people were quite sure that he must have been drunk—he must have dropped the thing somewhere, or put it somewhere: it would be found some day. Time passed on, but that box was not found. And the loss, the inconvenience, and the trouble resulting from its loss were frightful. To begin with, there were coupons of municipal bonds and such securities, things only paid to bearer, and never replaced if lost, representing investments to the amount of nearly three thousand pounds. The whole of this money, with its yearly interest, gone, unless the box should be found—clean gone. Is it wonderful that Daniel Leighan went mad, and tore his hair only to think of this terrible blow? Other papers there were, share certificates and so forth, which could be replaced by payment of a fee, but the coupons could not be replaced. Their payment could be stopped, but without presentation there was no payment possible.

Perhaps it was the agony of mind caused by this loss, perhaps the blow upon his head, which caused the paralysis of his legs. This affliction fell upon him a month or so after the accident. Then they put him in his chair beside his table, and propped him up with pillows, and he went abroad no more. But his brain was as clear as before, his will as strong, and his purpose as determined.

'Take your tea, uncle,' said Mary, 'and try to think no more of your horrid dream.'

CHAPTER IV.

CHALLACOMBE-BY-THE-MOOR.

THE village of Challacombe is known by sight to those excursionists from Teignmouth, Dawlish, or Torquay, who take the train to Bovey Tracey, and then go up by the char-à-bancs—locally called 'cherrybanks'—to Hey Tor and back; because, on the way, they pass through a little bit of Challacombe. It is also known to the people who take lodgings at Chagford for August, in the belief that they are going to be upon Dartmoor. Once during their stay

it is considered necessary to drive over to Challacombe. They do this, and when they have arrived, they get out, stand upon the Green, and gaze around. Then they either climb up the Tor which rises just beyond the Green, or they go to John Exon's inn for a cup of tea, or they get into the trap again and are driven away, under the impression that they have seen Challacombe. The village Green, however, is not the parish of Challacombe. Again, there are two or three farmhouses scattered about in the great parish, where lodgings can be procured; and those who take them for the season—if they are good walkers, and do not mind roads which cannot show one single level foot, or hot lanes which are deep and narrow, and run between high hedges of rose, blackberry, honeysuckle, and holly, which keep out the air—after six or seven weeks of exploration and research, allow themselves rashly to boast that they know Challacombe. But no; after a second visit, or a third, they are fain to confess that, of all the places they have ever visited, Challacombe is the hardest to know, and takes the longest time to learn.

This being so, no one will expect me to describe the place. Besides, it is so far from the ordinary track, so remote from fashion, so little adapted for visitors, that it would be cruel to tempt strangers there. Let them be contented with a glimpse of the Green from the cherrybank or the Chagford pony-carriage, just as the fashionable world which talks so much of art is contented with one single glimpse of the walls of the Royal Academy on the afternoon of the private view.

There is no village at Challacombe. There is a village Green, and there is a church; on one side of the Green is a long, low, picturesque old house with a porch, called Ivy Cottage, which was formerly the Rectory; on another side are John Exon's inn and Susan Wreford's village shop, which contains the post-office; on the third side are the walls of the Rectory garden, the village schools, and the farm buildings of Hedge Barton; lanes and another small house make up the fourth side of the irregular quadrangle formed by the Green. One or two primæval boulders still stand upon the Green too deeply bedded to be removed, and Farmer Cummings's pigs, geese, and turkeys claim the right of running over it. Close to the Green there was formerly a rude-stone circle, one of the many on and around Dartmoor; but there was a Rector—— Must one sling stones at the Church? Yet this is lamentably true. Once there was a Rector; pity that 'tis true. This good man—I say good, because I know nothing except this

one sin to charge against him—and one may commit one sin in a lifetime and yet be a good man—this Rector, therefore, suffered himself to be annoyed because antiquaries came and examined this circle, sketched it, planned it; walked around it and across it, measured it, laid their heads together over it, shook their fingers about it, and wagged their chins at each other over it—would have photographed it, but Dame Science did not yet permit that art to be practised—picnicked amid its stones, and brought with them their young friends—male and female they brought them, two by two—to look at these mysterious stones, and hear them talk. The young friends—those who were not antiquaries—only said, 'How deeply interesting!' and made the day, if it was fine, and the place, which is a very beautiful place, an occasion and a spot for the most delightful flirting. I think it was the flirting rather than the archæology which vexed his reverence, who had now grown old, poor dear, and could flirt with nobody any more, except his wife, and she was old too; not so old as her husband, but yet she wanted no more flirting. However, the Rector became so seriously annoyed that, one day in the winter, when there were no antiquaries about, he sent to Bovey for two men and some blasting-powder, and in a couple of days he had this rude-stone monument blown into little pieces and carted away. Melancholy ghosts of Druids, it is said, come to scream upon the spot all midsummer night, in guise of owls; and for many years the enraged and baffled antiquaries came regularly once in the month of June, which is sacred to stone circles and to Druids, and on the site of the perished circle they performed a solemn service of commination upon that Rector. They cursed him with the curses of Ernulphus; they cursed him out of the Psalms; they cursed him out of the Book of the Greater Excommunication; they cursed him after the manner of the Ancient Briton, the Mediæval Briton, and the Modern Briton. Whether any of the curses took, as vaccination takes, I know not; certain it is that the Rector is now no more, so that perhaps the commination killed him; perhaps, however, it only gave him toothache.

The village of Challacombe-by-the-Moor, even with the advantages held out to it of a church, a Green, a shop, and a public-house, refused to grow, or even to be born. This is odd. One reads of American cities with their church, their school, their hotel, and their weekly paper; but never of an American church, school, hotel, and weekly paper without a city. It is gratifying to be ahead of these pushing Americans even in so small a matter.

Challacombe is a parish of farms and farm-houses, with a hamlet or two—such as Watercourt and Frellands. It stretches on the east from Watersmeet, where the Bovey and the Becky fall into each other's arms, to the outlying farm of Barracot-on-the-Moor; it goes beyond Hamil Down on the west; and it begins on the north at Foxworthy, in the valley of the Bovey, and extends to the slopes of mighty Hey Tor on the south. Within these limits there is scenery of every kind except one: the fine champaign country which our forefathers loved so much is altogether wanting. Every field is on a slope, every lane runs up a hill, and every stream—there are four at least—goes plunging and tearing downwards over its bed of boulders and of gravel.

When Mary had given her uncle his tea, and cleared away the 'things'—you will not think the worse of her when I tell you that she washed the cups and saucers—they were lovely cups and saucers, and almost priceless, if Mary had but known—put them back upon the cabinet, and carried out the tray with her own hands—she left him to his papers and his pipe, took her hat and went into the porch, where she stood for a moment dangling her hat by its strings, shading her eyes with her hand, and taking a deep breath as if to change the atmosphere of age, disease, and avarice in the parlour for the sweet fresh air of the mountains outside. The porch, which was covered with jessamine, now beginning to put forth its waxen blossoms, led into the garden, which in front of the house is only a narrow patch with a tall Norfolk pine. But at the side of the house it is a goodly garden, planted with every kind of herb for the service and solace of man; stocked also with fruit-trees, and having an orchard where the cider-apples hang rosy red and golden yellow, yet sour enough to set the children's teeth on edge even unto the fourth and fifth generation. Beyond the low garden hedge stretched a great pasture-field, known as Great Camus—Little Camus being his neighbour. It lay quite across the ridge, here broad, on which the house was built, and sloped over into the valley below, where the Becky ran down its narrow gorge, hastening to keep its appointment with the Bovey beyond Riddy Rock. It is a quiet little stream in summer, and generally the water is so clear that you might as well fish in your bath as hope to entice the trout; in the spring, however, you would have heard it babble up here as it ran from boulder to boulder, under alder and willow and filbert tree, beneath the trailing arms of the bramble. You would have heard it roar as it leaped down the rocks of Becky Fall. Beyond the valley Mary gazed upon a huge

lump of a hill, Blackdown, solid, round, and steep. In its side they have cut the new road; its line lies a clear and well-marked scar upon the green slope, until it is hidden among the deep woods of Becky. Above these woods there rose and floated in the still air a thin wreath of smoke, just to show that among the trees were houses and human companionship. For my own part, I love not those wild and savage scenes where no hut or wreath of smoke speaks of brother man. Robinson Crusoe was of the same opinion. Above the woods and beyond the hill, three miles and more away, rose the two great pyramids of Hey Tor, standing out against the clear blue sky, which had not yet assumed the haze of evening. Everywhere hills; to the right of Hey Tor, but lower down, the tumbled rocks of Hound Tor, looking like the ruined walls and shattered fragments of some great mediæval castle; lower still, Hayne Down, with its rocks thrown carelessly like coals from a shovel down its steep face. They were the playthings of some infant giant in the days gone by; he built houses out of them, and then kicked them over, just as a child builds his houses of wooden bricks and knocks them down. One of his toy structures still remains; a pile of stones one above the other, making a pillar thirty feet high, which men call Bowerman's Nose. There had been rain in the morning; the clouds had passed away, though they were still clinging to the trees and rolling along the sides of the valley below, as often happens at Challacombe after rain; the air was so clear that you could see the rocks of Hey Tor as plainly as if you stood beside them, and every change of curve in light and shadow on Blackdown across the valley.

The birds in July are mostly silent, yet at Challacombe their song never wholly ceases all the year round. From the trees behind the house there was heard the song of the thrush; a robin whistled from the garden-croft; from a neighbouring hedge Mary heard the shrill screech of the wren; somewhere was a jay chattering in his harsh voice; somewhere was a dove cooing; the swifts screamed high in the air, thinking of their nests on top of the church-tower; and the chiffchaff sang the merry notes which delight him all the summer long.

Mary saw this scene and heard these sounds every day of her life, yet she never tired of it; though she would have been unable to put into words the desire for the mountains which grows with the growth of those who live among them. Then, with a little flush upon her cheek and a brightening of her eye, she went out of the garden and to the back of the house, where she knew George

Sidcote waited to take her to the choir-practice, for 'twas Saturday evening.

Most houses, even in the country, put their best side to the front. Gratnor kept its best side at the back. There is no view, to be sure; but there is a babbling little stream, about two feet broad, which runs merrily among miniature cañons and gullies; a leet is taken from this stream by a little wooden canal to the great water-wheel which stands more than half hidden in its dark and mysterious recess; the canal is leaky, and the water trickles for ever melodiously upon the stones below. The place looks like a clearance in the forest; but an old clearance, not one of those where the stumps stand dotted about the field. Beyond the stream the ground rises steeply. This is the slope of Oddy Tor, by some called Nympenhole and by others Viper Tor. It is clothed with thick woods, dark and impenetrable, which hide the moss-grown boulders on the top. A gate opens to a lane which leads to the Green through the hamlet of Watercourt, past the little chapel, where the people who go to church in the morning gather in the evening, to hear what they consider a purer gospel—though less respectable. It is 'served' from Chagford, where I think that the illustrious Mr. Perrott could tell you something about it. There is something pathetic in the way that country people go contentedly to church, and listen to a gentleman and a scholar in the morning, and in the evening gather round one of their own folk, who speaks to them in the language they can understand, and out of the ideas which are in their own heads. The lane also passes the smithy, where Harry Rabjahns and his two 'prentices all day long blow the bellows and beat the anvil.

It was to the back of Gratnor that George Sidcote came to meet his sweetheart. He might have gone to the front had he chosen —the house was not closed to him—Daniel would have received him with such cordiality as he bestowed upon any. But it is not pleasant to call upon a man who refuses his consent to your marriage, and to whom you owe more money than you can pay. George, therefore, usually sat upon a tree—there were always the trunks of trees lying about—or, if it rained, took refuge in the linney, where he waited for Mary before they went together to the church to practise next day's hymns and chants.

CHAPTER V.

FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE.

THE reason why farmers, gardeners, and cultivators of the soil generally are so fond of sitting down upon anything that offers, leaning against door-posts, hanging over gates, and in every way relieving the legs of their natural duties, is, I suppose, because they get up so early. If a man is crossing a meadow after rain, or a ploughed field after a thaw, at six in the morning, he finds comfort on a waggon-shaft at seven in the evening. It is not because he stands so much, but because he is standing so early. Shop-girls do not want to be always sitting when the shop is closed: they would rather be dancing; and policemen off duty are said to take their rest standing, for aught I know, on one leg, like the secretary bird. George Sidcote, on this July evening, had been up since five, and he waited for his sweetheart, a briar-root between his lips, sitting on the shaft of a waggon under the linney, where it was shady and cool. When Mary came through the garden-gate he rose slowly, partly because he was a Devonshire man and partly because if a man is over six feet in stature he naturally takes longer to get upon his feet than one of the short-legged brotherhood, who are jointed with indiarubber. Then he laid his pipe down upon the waggon, took both her hands in his, bent over her and kissed her gravely on the forehead, as if to seal her once more for his own. There was little of the sweet love-language between these two: they belonged to each other; they were so well assured of the fact that there was no need to renew their vows any more than between a couple who have been married a dozen years.

'George!' said Mary softly.

'Mary!' George whispered.

Some maidens would like more of the passion and rapture which finds vent in passionate and rapturous words—such as those employed by all poets, and by novelists in that line of business. Very few young persons, even of the most dazzling beauty, get this passion and rapture, simply because their lovers, however capable in other respects, are incapable of finding those words. Men, therefore, fall back upon the commonplaces of passion—mere 'dear ducky' language—though their hearts be red-hot, and though in

'THEN HE KISSED HER GRAVELY ON THE FOREHEAD, AS IF TO SEAL HER ONCE MORE FOR HIS OWN.'

the language of the last century, they burn, and melt, and die. You may observe in the law reports, though many actions for breach of promise are tried, and many love-letters are read, the wisdom, indeed, rises above the 'dear ducky' level, except into verse, which is never original. George Sidcote, rise to these flights of articulated speech, nor understood him had he made the attempt. She was her lover. To have a lover, or a sweet ladies, ought to make you extremely ; and, really, to have such a comely lover of Sidcote Farm, Challacombe, is, perhaps fairies have in their power to bestow. six feet ; and as for his form, it was like liest beauty ; but Tom had the advantage, off that beauty with a greased pigtail as was steadfast, his cheek ruddy, his eyes Mary's before her uncle had his dream, his

They sat down together on the waggon-sha George took up his pipe.

'I saw him this morning,' he said slowly—Mary kn who was meant by 'him'—'and I told him what I told other day, my dear.'

'What did he say?'

'He said that he knew it beforehand. He had calculated it all out on paper, and he was certain, he said, that this season would be the last. "Very well," he said, "the law provides a remedy when the interest or the principal cannot be repaid. Of course," he added, "I am not going to lose my money." That is what he said first, Mary.'

'Oh! and what did he say next?'

'I told him that if he would give his consent, your fortune would nearly pay off the mortgage.'

'What did he say then?'

'Well, Mary, then we had a little row—not much. He said that it was clear I only wanted your money, and he should never give his consent. I said that it was clear he meant to make any excuse to refuse his consent, in order to keep your money in his own hands.'

"I am sorry, George,' said Mary. 'He told me nothing of this.'

'It was not likely that he would tell you. He heard what I had to say in his dry way, and then asked me if there was anything more that I wished to say. Well, Mary, I was roused a bit by this,

and I reminded him that, if you did not receive your aunt's fortune, David would be entitled to the money. Well, he was not the least put out. He only laughed—his laugh is the sort that make[s] people cry—and said that you were a good girl, but silly, [as] girls, and if you chose to throw away your fortune he [was] for you, but he could not prevent it. Well, Ma[ry] So that is done with ; and this is the last year [we] the old stock in the old place.'

'Courage, George,' she said, 'we will do [not] go somewhere—somehow we will live and [be]

'"Somewhere!"' he echoed, 'and [what] I have a pair of hands and a pair of bro[ken] you, Mary, and my mother?'

'Courage,' she said [I] have [faith] in George. Even if we have to go away, we [will] together. [It] was reading yesterday a story about settl[ers] in Canada. It had pictures. There was the wooden house, and [the] clearing with the forest all round ; I thought it might be ours. I read how they worked, this pair of settlers, and how they gradually got on, clearing more land, and increasing their stock till they became rich in everything except money. I thought of ourselves, George ; we shall not want money if we can live on a farm of our own somewhere, and if we can work for ourselves. You are so strong and brave, you do not mind hard work ; and—and—let us have faith, George. God is good. If we must go from here, we will go with cheerful hearts, and leave my poor uncle to his lands and wealth.'

Thus, when Adam and Eve went forth together from their paradise into the cold world, it was the woman who admonished and exhorted the man.

In these latter days it hath pleased Providence in wisdom to afflict the British farmer with bad seasons and low prices, and the prospect of worse to follow ; wherefore, he will perhaps soon become a creature of the past, and the broad acres of Great Britain and Ireland will be turned into pheasant preserves and forest-land for the red-deer, let at fabulous prices to millionaires from the United States. As for the rustics, all except one in fifty will migrate to the towns, where they will seek for work and will find none, and then there will be riots and risings, with murders and robbery. What will happen after that I do not know, except that there will certainly be no recruits left for the British army ; so that, unless—as seems possible—other nations may be similar and similarly affected, our nation will presently go under, and be no

more heard of, except in history; and someone will write 'Britannia fuit' on a gigantic slab, with 'Suicided in defence of Free Trade' also done into Latin, and stuck up the legend on the cliff at Dover for all the world to read.

George Sidcote's history may be guessed from his words. An inheritance of a small estate, a single farm, his own land, and the land that had been his forefathers'; the estate encumbered with a mortgage, which had become in these bad times harder to pay off than rent, because rent may be adjusted, but the five per cent. is like the law of the Medes and Persians. And the time had come when the struggle could no longer be maintained; the land would be taken from him. It is not wonderful if the young man looked sorrowful, and his countenance was heavy.

'What does it mean?' George asked, in ever-increasing wonder. 'Formerly, there was nothing in the world so valuable as the land. If a man had money, he bought land; if a man wanted an investment, he put it out on mortgage. Is the land gone worthless? My father, Mary, was offered, if he would sell his land, three times the money that old Dan lent him on mortgage, and now it would not sell, at most, for more. What does it mean?'

Alas! This is a question which is asked daily, not only by farmers, like George, but by Deans and Canons, Rectors and Vicars, colleges and schools, landlords and investors, widows and orphans, those who keep shops in country towns, the thousands who live by working for the farmers, the engineers and wheelwrights, the corn-factors and middlemen; nay, even by those who live by providing the pleasures of the rich. What does it mean? And are the fields of these islands to become as worthless as the slag that lies outside the smelting furnaces? Shade of Cobden, deign to listen! What does it mean?

'Oh, George!' said Mary, 'does it help us at all to ask that question?' Indeed, George was as importunate with this difficulty as her uncle was with his lost money. 'Let us face the trouble, whatever it is. You will let me go with you—I will not be a drag upon you—if it is only to take care of mother for you.'

He threw his arm round her neck and kissed her again—an unusual demonstration from him.

'You would put courage into a cur, Mary,' he said. 'There! I have done what I could, and I have told your uncle my mind. Let us talk of something else. Oh! I forgot to say that Will has come down. We shall find him waiting for us at the church.'

'Will? I am glad!'

'He got away a week before he expected.'

'He will cheer you up, George.'

'Yes; he talks as if nothing mattered much, and everything was a game. The Londoners have that way, I suppose. It is not our way.'

They left the linney and the little brook, and walked away through the narrow lanes, holding each other by the hand like two children, as they had always done since they were children together, and George, who was three years older, led little Mary by the hand to keep her from falling.

This Will—I do not mean the Will and Testament of Mary's Aunt—that George spoke of with irreverence was none other than myself, the person who narrates this true history of country life for your amusement and instruction. I am sure, at least, that it is fuller of instruction than most of the leading articles that I am allowed to write. I am Will Nethercote, in fact: and though of the same surname as Mary, and a Devonshire man by birth and descent, am no relation to Mary. I once endeavoured, it is true, to remedy this accident, and proposed to establish a very close relationship indeed with that dear girl, but I was too late. My father was the Rector—you may see his monument in the churchyard—and when I left Oxford I found I had no vocation for the life of the country clergyman. Heavens! what a calm and holy life some men make of it, and how some do fret and worry because of its calmness and inactivity! Therefore, I became a journalist. It is a profession which suits me well, and I suppose if I live another forty years, and arrive at seventy, I shall have written nine thousand more leading articles, and my countrymen will then be saturated with wisdom. And when I retire no one will ever know the name of the man who led them upwards to those higher levels of knowledge and philosophy. I did not wait for these young people in the churchyard. I walked down the lane to meet them.

I declare that my heart leaped up only to see that sweet, fond girl walking with her lover, only to see the glow upon her cheeks and the soft light in her eyes. What says the foolish old song, 'I'd crowns resign to call her mine'? Crowns, quotha! If I had Earl's coronet, Bishop's mitre, Royal crown, or even a tiara, I would resign it with the greatest alacrity for such a prize. Happy lover! though to win his bride he must take her penniless, while he has to give up his own broad lands! Well, she was not for me. Mary greeted me with her usual kindness, bearing no resentment on account of that proposition of mine above referred to.

and how is George behaving, Mary? And has the Dragon relented?'

'George always behaves well,' she said. 'But as for the Dragon——' She shook her head.

'See now, Mary,' I said, 'I mean to put the case before a lawyer. I will do it directly I go back. In the will—I went to Somerset House on purpose to see it—your aunt leaves you £6,000, to be paid to you on the day that you marry with your uncle's consent. If you marry without your uncle's consent, it is to go to David. Well, David has gone away, no one knows where, and perhaps he is dead, or will never come back. Suppose you were to marry now without your uncle's consent, who is to have the money?'

'My uncle says it will be his own.'

'We shall see to that. It is a case for a lawyer's advice. And I will get that advice directly I go back.'

I did not consult a lawyer on the point for a very good reason, as you shall hear. I suppose that as civilization advances, such wills with conditions so absurd will cease to be made; or, if they are made, will be put into the hands of novelists for their purposes in treating of a world that has gone by. Girls who have money left to them will have it handed over when they come of age, with perfect liberty to marry as they please. Certain it is, considering the great interest which we all take in each other's affairs, there will not be wanting plenty of friends to give advice and information as to the character, reputation, and income of aspirants. I have sometimes thought that nobody ought, under any circumstances, to make any will at all, or after his death to do by his own provision and ordering any good or evil whatever. But I find this doctrine at present in advance of the world, and therefore it commands no favour.

'I am not back in Challacombe yet, Mary,' I went on, because I knew the trouble that was before them and in their minds, and so I began to make talk. 'This is only a dream. I am in Fleet Street. I am in the lobby of the House. I am writing a political leader at midnight, and just dreaming of Challacombe. It takes a week to get the streets and the papers out of my head—a whole week! what a curtailment and docking of a holiday. A whole week sliced out of a month! and then eleven months more of slavery! Man's life is not a vapour, Mary. I wish it was. Vapours don't grind at the mill every day.'

I turned and walked towards the church with them, in the narrow lanes between the high hedges. The beauty of early summer was

gone, but there are still flowers in plenty to make them beautiful in July and August. The honeysuckle was out; the blue scabious and the foxgloves are not yet gone; there are the pink centaury, the herb-robert, the red-robin, the campion, the meadow-sweet, the sheep's-bite, the ox-eyed daisies, the blackberry blossom, and the rowan berries—green, or greenish-yellow, as yet—old friends all, and friends of Mary's.

We talked of indifferent subjects, of what had happened since I last came down. One of the rustics was dead, another had nearly lost the use of his legs in the cold weather and now hobbled on crutches—in these high lands rheumatism seizes on all the old and on many of the middle-aged, so that Moreton Hampstead, the metropolis of the Moor, seems on market-day like the native city of M. le Diable Boîteux; one or two village girls had been married; such a farm was still wanting a tenant, and so on. Pleasant to talk a little of the place where one was born, and of the people whom one has known from infancy; pleasant to be back once more among the hills and streams. But that subject of which we were all thinking—George's impending ruin—lay like a lump of lead on our hearts. And so we walked through the darkening lanes, our faces to the west, so that Mary's glowed in the golden light like an angel-face in a painted window, and presently came to the church.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CHOIR-PRACTICE.

In the church the choir were already assembled, and were waiting for them. They are so old-fashioned at Challacombe that they actually suffer the maidens to sing in the choir with the boys and the men. 'Tis a Christian custom, though forbidden by some modern Ecclesiastics; and why women still consent to go to churches where their sex is continually insulted by exclusion from the choir, as if they were really the unclean creatures of the Monkish mind, I know not. Some day, when they understand the thing, and why they are excluded, and what a deadly insult it is to Mother Eve and her daughters, there will be a revolt the like of which no Church has ever yet seen, and a schism compared with which all previous schisms will have been mere trifles. The choir of Challacombe consisted, therefore, of half a dozen boys, and as many village maidens, with Harry Rabjahns, the blacksmith, for bass, and George Sidcote for tenor. There was a harmonium at the west end, and

'WE WALKED THROUGH THE DARKENING LANES, OUR FACES TO THE WEST, SO THAT MARY'S GLOWED IN THE GOLDEN LIGHT LIKE AN ANGEL FACE IN A PAINTED WINDOW.'

the choir sat in front of it. Formerly there were violins, a 'cello, and a clarionet; but these have fallen into disfavour of late years, and I know not where one may now go to hear the quaint old village church music, which had its points, of which a solemn and awe-inspiring droning and a mysterious rumbling were perhaps the chief.

As soon as we arrived, the practice began. They sang, right through, first the chants and then the hymns both for Morning and Evening, so that the practice took an hour and more. The voices and the singing were as familiar to me as the rustling of the trees outside and the cackling of the geese upon the green.

I sat in the porch and listened, watching the fading light in the windows and the shadows falling along the aisles, while the voices of the choir, uplifted, rang out clear and true, and echoed around the walls of the empty church, and beat about among the rafters of the roof. It is an old church and a venerable, though they have now taken away the ancient, crumbling, and worm-eaten pews, which were, I dare say, ugly, and yet gave character to the church. With the old pews disappeared certain memories and associations. You could no longer picture, because you could no longer gaze upon them, how, in the old days, Grandfather Derges went round, cane in hand, to chastise the boys in the middle of the sermon; he did not take them out into the churchyard and there administer his whacking, but he whacked them in the very pews. Grandfather Derges has now retired from his function as sexton, though he still breathes these upper airs, and hobbles along the lanes upon his sticks. Great-uncle Sam Derges, however, still carries round the plate on Sunday. The old pews are gone, and with them, also, the memories of the yeomen who sat in them, each family in its own place, from generation to generation. As the yeomen, too, are gone, and only tenant-farmers left, perhaps it is as well that the pews have gone. Something, however, is left of the old church. They have not taken down the ancient rood-screen, with its painted Apostles in faded colours, on which, in the old days, I was wont to gaze with wonder and curiosity, what time my father mildly read his discourse, which everybody heard with attention and nobody heeded. Had the Rector possessed the lungs of Peter the Hermit, and the persuasion of Bernard of Clairvaux, 'twould have been all the same, for the sermon to the rustic means nothing but a quarter of an hour of good behaviour in the presence of his betters.

Presently it grew so dark that they lighted two or three candles on the harmonium, where they showed, amid the shadows of the aisles, like far-off glimmering stars. Among the voices I could

clearly distinguish George's clear high tenor and Mary's soprano. They rose above the rest and seemed to sing each for each alone, and to fit the music by themselves, as if they wanted nothing but each other, and could together make sweet music all their lives.

Outside, the clouds had come up again and were now rolled over all the sky, so that the evening was strangely dark for the time of year, and there was a rumbling of summer thunder among the hills and in the combes, which echoed from side to side and ran down the valley slopes.

Then my thoughts left the choir and the singing and wandered off to the subject which made them both so sad.

The situation was gloomy. How could I help save to stand by and encourage to patience? George had already told me all. It was, indeed, what I fully expected to hear.

'I can no longer keep up the struggle,' he said; 'the land cannot pay the interest on the mortgage, even if I live as poorly as a labourer and work as hard. I have seen Daniel Leighan, and I have told him that this year must be the last. When the harvest is in, he must foreclose if he pleases. It is hard, Will; is it not?'

'Is there no hope, George?'

'None. Either the interest must be paid, or the principal. Else—else'—he paused and sighed—'else there will be no more Sidcotes left in Challacombe.'

'But if he would consent——'

'He will never consent. He would have to part with Mary's money if he did consent. He means to keep it in his own hands. We are tight in the old man's grip. He will foreclose; then he will have Sidcote, as he got Berry Down and Foxworthy, and he will keep Mary's fortune.'

'What will you do, George?'

'I shall emigrate to some place, if there is any place left, where a man can till the land and live upon it. Will, is there some dreadful curse upon this country for our sins, that the land can no longer be cultivated because it will not even keep the pair of hands which dig it and plough it?'

'I know nothing about our sins, old man: that department never furnishes the theme for a leader. But there are certain economic forces at work—which is the scientific way in which we put a thing when we don't see our way about—economic forces, George, by which the agricultural interests of the country are being ruined, and its best blood is destroyed by being driven from the fields into the towns. Our sins may have been the cause; but I don't think

so, George, or else you would have been spared. Now, economic forces—confound them !—act on saint and sinner alike.'

'I work like the farm-labourer that I am. There is no way in which I do not try to save and spare ; but it is in vain. The land will no longer bear the interest.'

'What does Mary say ?'

'She will go with me. Whatever happens, she will be happier with me than here—alone.'

'Right, dear lad. Where should she be but with you ?'

'We will marry without his consent. Then he will be unmolested in her fortune and my farm. I dare say there will be a hundred or two left after the smash. Poor girl !—and I thought we should have been so happy in the old place. Poor Mary !'

Here was enough for a man to think about in the porch ! What could I do ? How could I help ? Was there any hope of bending the will of a stubborn, avaricious old man by pleading and entreaty ? Could I pay off the mortgage ? Why, I had no more money than any young journalist just beginning to make an income may be expected to have. At the most, I might find a few hundreds to lend. But Challacombe without Mary ! Sidcote without George ! —then there would be no more beauty in the woods ; no more sunshine on the slopes ; no more gladness on the breezy Tors ! And the Past came back to me—the Past which always seems so tender and so full of joy : I saw again the two boys and the girl playing together, rambling over the downs, climbing together the granite rocks, reading together—always together. How would Challacombe continue to exist unless two out of those three remained together ?

The black clouds hanging low made the evening so dark that outside the porch one could see nothing. But the lightning began to play about and lit up the gravestones with sudden gleams. Presently, looking out into the blackness, I discovered, in one of these flashes, a man in the churchyard walking about among the graves. This was a strange thing to see. A man walking among the graves after dark. I waited for the next flash of lightning. When it came, I saw the man quite clearly : he was bending over a headstone, and peering into it, as if trying to read the name of the person buried there. There is something uncanny about a man in a quiet village churchyard choosing a night darkened with thunderclouds for the perusal of tombstones. One thinks of a certain one who lived among the tombs : and he was a demoniac.

Then the man left the grass, probably because he could no

longer read any of the names, and began to walk along the gravel walk towards the porch ; perhaps because he saw the lights and heard the singing. You know how, sometimes, when the air is full of electricity, one shivers and trembles and hears things as in a dream ? Well, I seemed to recognise this man's footstep, though I could not tell to whom it belonged ; and I shivered as if with prescience of coming trouble.

Whoever the man was, he stood at the entrance of the porch, and looked about him in a hesitating, doubtful way. The choir were just beginning the last of their hymns—

'Lead kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom ;
Lead Thou me on.'

'That's the voice of George Sidcote,' said the stranger aloud, and addressing himself, not me. 'He always sang the tenor : I remember his voice well ; and that's the voice of Mary Nethercote : I remember her voice, too. That's Harry Rabjahns, the blacksmith, singing bass : a very good bass he always sang. Ay ; they are all there—they are all there.'

'Who are you ?' I asked. 'Who are you to know all the people ?'

A sudden flash of lightning showed me a ragged man with a great beard, whom I knew not by sight.

'I know you, too. I didn't see you at first. You are Will Nethercote.' His voice was hoarse and husky. 'You are the son of the Rector. I remember you very well.'

'I am ; but the Rector is dead ; and who are you ?'

'Before I go on,' he said ; 'before I go on,' he repeated these words as if they had some peculiar significance to him, 'I thought I would come here first and see his grave—*his* grave—the place where they laid him—and I thought I would read what they wrote over him—how he died, you know—just out of curiosity, and for something to remember.'

'Laid whom ?' The man, then, was, like that other, doubtless a demoniac.

'I should like to think that I had seen—actually seen—his grave,' he went on. 'But the night has turned dark, and I can't read the names, and haven't got a match upon me. Will you tell me where they've laid him ?'

'Laid whom, man ? Who are you looking for ?'

'I am looking for the headstone of Daniel Leighan.'

'Daniel Leighan ?'

'Old Dan, they used to call him. Who died six years ago, or thereabouts.'

'You mean Mr. Leighan, of Gratnor?'

'The same, the same! I suppose Mary Nethercote got Gratnor when he died. They always said that he would leave her all he had, Gratnor Farm and Foxworthy and Berry Down. Oh, she'd be rich with all those lands.'

'Who told you that Daniel Leighan was dead?'

'I saw it,' he replied, hesitating, 'I saw it in the papers. There was some talk about it at the time, I believe. A—a—a Coroner's inquest, I was told; but I never heard the verdict. Perhaps you remember the verdict, Will Nethercote, and would kindly tell me? I am—yes—I am curious to hear what the verdict of the jury was——'

'You are strangely misinformed. Daniel Leighan is not dead.'

'There is only one old Dan Leighan, and he is dead,' returned the strange man.

'I tell you that old Dan Leighan is still living. He is paralysed in his legs, if you call that dead; but if you have business with him you will find that he is very much alive—as much alive as you.'

'Not dead?' The man reeled and caught at the pillars of the porch. 'Not dead? Do you know what you are saying?'

'No more dead than you.'

'Oh!' he groaned, 'this is a trick you are playing. What do you play tricks for? He is dead and buried long since.'

'I think you must be mad, whoever you are. I tell you that Daniel Leighan is alive, and now in his chair at home, where you may find him to-night if you please to look for him.'

'Not dead! not dead!' By the frequent flashes of the lightning I had now made out that he was a very rough-looking man, in very ragged and tattered dress, looking like a labouring man but for his beard, which was much larger and fuller than an English labourer ever wears. 'Not dead!—can it be! Then I've had all the trouble for nothing—all the trouble for nothing. Not dead!' He kept on saying this over and over again, as if the wonder of the thing was altogether too much for him.

'What do you mean?' I asked, 'by your rubbish about an inquest and a verdict? What inquest should there be? And what do you mean by saying that you saw it in the papers?'

'Not dead? Then how should his ghost walk if he is not dead? Are you sure that Daniel Leighan—Old Dan—is alive this day—the same Old Dan?'

'I suppose it is the same Old Dan. There has never been any other Old Dan that I know of.'

'It can't be the same. It must be the Devil.'

'That is possible, and now you mention it, I think he may be, and very likely is, the Devil. But I wouldn't say so openly, if I were you.'

'Not dead.!'

He turned and walked slowly away. I heard him stepping over the stile, and then the sound of his footsteps ceased, as if he was walking over the village green, which, in fact, was the case.

The voices of the choir ceased; the candles were extinguished; and the singers came out. We two men walked home with Mary. There was no air in the lanes; the night was hot and sultry, and the lightning flashed incessantly. I told them on the way my little adventure with the strange man peering about among the tombs.

'It was like a bit of some old German story,' I said. 'I don't know why a German story; but when there is lightning with darkness, gravestones and a mysterious figure, one thinks of Germany somehow. I thought he was the spectre of some dead-and-gone villager come back in his old clothes—gone ragged, you know, in his wanderings about the other world—to take a walk round the churchyard among his friends; a strange thing to be prowling among the tombs to read the name of a man still living!'

'Who could he be?' asked Mary.

'I thought I knew his footstep, but I did not know his voice. I cannot tell who it was. He knew your voice, Mary; and yours, George; and Harry, the blacksmith's——Good heavens!—for here my memory of the man came back suddenly, with one of the lightning flashes—'Good heavens! how did I come not to recognise him at once? Mary, it was!—— how could I have forgotten? Why, the thing may change your whole future!——'

'Will, what do you mean?'

'Your whole future, Mary! Your uncle refuses his consent because he thinks that David is dead; well, then, *David is alive!* For the man who prowled among the tombs and wanted to see your uncle's headstone was no other than David Leighan himself—come home again in rags!'

CHAPTER VII.

WHO IS HE?

THE inn upon Challacombe Green is a small place and a humble, though visitors who drive over from Chagford may get tea served in a neat and clean parlour, and those who find no solace in tea may

refresh themselves with beer or cider. But let them not look for food, for there is no butcher or any shop of purveyor or provider within four miles. Yet, if a man should desire a bed, he may find one here, clean and sweet, if he write for it beforehand; and meat as well to stay the inner man, provided the landlord has been warned in time to catch the butcher. The inn is licensed to Joseph Exon. It has no bar or tap-room; but Mrs. Exon receives her friends in a large, low room, which is at once the keeping-room, kitchen, and drawing-room of the Exon family. It is also the smoking divan of the parish of Challacombe. The room is paved with stone, and furnished with a long wooden table and benches, a high-backed wooden settle to pull before the fire in cold weather, and a broad, hospitable fireplace. The kettle is always on the hob; overhead, the black rafters are adorned with sides of bacon and strings of onions; the cider and the beer are fetched from a narrow closet or cellar at the end of the room. There are seldom many men in the place, except on Saturday nights; and, as a rule, everybody is gone, the inn shut up, and the family are asleep in their beds, by half-past nine. It is, moreover, essentially a village inn, designed for the rustics of that village which has never existed: the farmers would not, for instance, be seen sitting in its room in the evening, or at any other time; it is the club, the resort, and the place of recreation for the labourers.'

The room was about half full at nine o'clock this Saturday evening. Three or four men, strangers, who had come up from Newton Abbot on a road-making job, were drinking beer. The rest, labourers on the Challacombe farms, sat every man behind a tankard of cider—that sour brew which nips the throat, and, somehow, though it is so sour and so weak, refreshes the hot haymakers or the weary traveller better than any other drink ever invented. The fire was burning, although it was midsummer. The company sat about the room for the most part in silence; not because there was nothing to say, but because those who meet every night know very well that what they have to say everybody else has to say; speech, therefore, is needless. Had these rustics been Americans or Colonials, they would have played whist, poker, monty, or euchre, also in silence; being Devonshire men, they sat and smoked their pipes, as their fathers and grandfathers had done, in a friendly silence which was in itself restful; and they felt the convivial influences of repose and fellowship.

The latch was lifted, and an unknown person—a stranger—stood in the door, looking about the room. Strangers, in guise of

tourists, are often seen on Challacombe Green in the daytime; they come over in traps of every description: but these strangers are dressed in tweeds or broadcloth. Such a stranger as he who stood in the doorway and looked around is rare indeed. Tramps and vagabonds never come to Challacombe; men really in search of work seldom, for they inquire first at Moreton or at Bovey, where it is well known that there is no work to be had in the parish except farm-work, and of hands there are more than enough in these bad times, so that the population of every parish is slowly decreasing.

Such a stranger, too! Devonshire rustics are not close followers of fashion to gird at a man because he goes in raiment roughhewn. But there is a point where the honest garb of labour begins to become the contemptible rags and tatters of destitution. And there is a point at which the duds of the beggar seem ready to drop to pieces, should Providence suffer a shower to fall upon them. Both these points had been reached—and passed—by the rags upon this man. He was clothed, in fact, in the same things, ragged and weather-stained, which he had worn all the way from Australia. Fancy undertaking a long voyage with no luggage at all—absolutely none, not even a hand-bag or a hat-box, or even a pocket-handkerchief full of things! A voyage all the way from Sydney without a change! His flannel shirt was torn down the front and exposed his chest; a dirty red-cotton handkerchief was tied around his neck; a leather strap, buckled round his waist, seemed absolutely necessary to prevent that shirt from fluttering off in the breeze. His trousers were of the coarsest and commonest canvas, such as are worn in this country only for the roughest work, and put off when that is done; his hat was the same shapeless old felt which he had worn in the South Sea Islands, but now enriched with a hole, recently excavated, in the crown, which gave it an inexpressibly forlorn appearance. No one who had the least self-respect, or the command of a poor single shilling, would have worn such a hat; not the poorest tramp on the road, not the raggedest wretch on the Queen's highway would so much as stoop to pick up such a thing. Not the lowest rag-and-bone-man, or the meanest dealer in marine stores, would have offered a farthing for that hat.

His only respectable garment was an old sailor's jacket, worn and shabby, but yet respectable. It had been bestowed upon him by one of the hands when he came aboard, with nothing but his flannel shirt.

David Leighan had money in his pocket—all that was left of his

share of the Baron's cheque. Yet he had worn these things so long, that he had left off even thinking about them; they were ragged and shabby, but what was he who wore them? Besides, if you come all the way from Australia in obedience to an unfortunate ghost, who gives you no rest until you have consented to come, and all for the sole purpose of making confession and atonement, and giving yourself up to justice as a murderer; and if you expect to meet with the care and attention which are always lavished upon the personal comfort of a criminal in the interval between the day of humiliation and the day of elevation, why waste money on mere outward finery and fashionable display? Add to the tattered and torn garments of this remarkable man—the like of whom had never before been seen in Challacombe—an immense beard, long, not silky, as some beards are, but coarse and stiff, if not stubbly, and of a red hue, rather than brown, which covered two feet or so of his chest, and was nearly as broad as his shoulders, and a mass of matted hair which had neither been cut nor combed for a longer time than one likes to think of. Such as this, the new-comer stood at the open door and looked about the room as one who remembers it. But his face was seared, and his eyes seemed as if they saw nothing. Mrs. Exon, at sight of him, spoke up.

'Now, my man,' she said, 'what do you want? We don't encourage tramps here. You must go as far as Bovey to get a bed to-night.'

'I am not a tramp,' he replied hoarsely. 'I have got money. See.' He pulled out a handful of silver. 'Let me come in, and give me a glass of brandy.'

He shut the door and sat down at the lowest end of the table, taking off his hat, and shaking his long hair off his forehead. Six years ago, all the men in the room would have risen out of respect to the owner of Berry Down. Now, not a soul remembered him.

Mrs. Exon gave him a tumbler with some brandy in it, and set a jug of cold water beside him. She looked at him curiously, being touched, perhaps, with some note of familiarity or recollection at the sight of his face, and the sound of his voice. He drank off the brandy neat and set down the tumbler. What was the matter with the man? His eyes were full of trouble, and with a kind of trouble which the good woman had never seen before. Not pain of body, or grief, but yet trouble. He dropped his head upon his chest, and began to murmur aloud as if no one was in the place but himself.

'Not dead! he is not dead! How can that be? how can that be?' Then he lifted his head again and gave back the glass to Mrs. Exon. 'Bring me more brandy,' he said.

The landlady obeyed, and gave him a second tot of brandy in the tumbler, and again indicated the jug of cold water. The man had now begun to tremble in every limb; legs and arms and hands were shaking and trembling. His head shook, his shoulders shook, his lips moved. The guests in the room stared and wondered. Then he fixed his eyes upon the landlady's, and gazed upon her as if she could read in them what ailed him. Bewilderment and amazement, which beat upon his soul, as the old poet said, as a madman beats upon a drum—this was the trouble which caused his eyes to have that terrifying glare, and his limbs to shake and tremble. Not joy, or even relief, such as might have been expected; these might come later, when the man who, for six long years, had been pursued by the fury of a murder-stained conscience, should realise that he was, after all, no murderer, save in intent. David Leighan's mind was naturally very slow to move. He could not at first understand how the whole long torture of conscience, the frightful dreams, the profound and hopeless misery of his exile could go for nothing; why, it had taken him years of suffering, and the constant terror of a nightly phantom to persuade himself that the only way to escape the torture of his days and nights was to return to England and confess his crime. This once done, he felt certain that the nightly horror, and the daily fearful looking for judgment, would disappear; and he would go to the gallows with cheerfulness, as a sharp but certain remedy for pangs intolerable. There are instances recorded—I know not with what truth—of murderers who have actually forgotten their crime, and gone about the world with hearts as light as before they did it. David was not one of these superior murderers. He had never for one moment forgotten the white face of his victim, and the staring eyes in which there was no light or life. He saw Death—Death with suddenness and violence—all day long, and dreamed of Death all the night. And now he could not understand that his dreams and his visions, his guilty fears, and his contemplated confessions, were all vain imaginations, and might have been neglected. Therefore he sat trembling.

Mrs. Exon watched him, thinking he must have a fit of ague. He drank off the second glass of brandy neat, and set down the glass. Then his head dropped again, and he resumed his muttered broken words, still trembling violently.

'Not dead!—he is not dead! How can that be?—how can that be?' He lifted his head again, 'Give me more brandy! Give me a great tumbler full of brandy!'

'The poor man is ill,' said Mrs. Exon. 'Well, if brandy will stop the shivering—it's a fever, likely, or an ague that he's got—here, my man, drink this.' She gave him half a tumbler full, which he poured down.

The third dose had the effect of composing him a little. His legs ceased trembling, though still his hands shook.

'Yes,' he said; 'I am ill. I was took sudden just now. I am better now.'

He sat up and took a long breath.

'Where may you have come from?' asked one of the men.

'I've come from Southampton, where I was put ashore. I've come all the way from Australia.'

'And where might you be going to next?'

'I'll tell you that, my friend, as soon as I know.' Ragged and rough as he looked, he spoke, somehow, as if he belonged to something better than would have been judged by his appearance. 'If you had asked me this morning, I should have told you that I was going to Bovey. Now I don't know.'

Mrs. Exon still looked at him with the curiosity which comes of a half-uneasy recollection.

'Old Dan Leighan, now,' he went on; 'can anyone give me news of him? I mean Old Dan, him as had Gratnor first and Foxworthy afterwards, and then got Berry Down, being a crafty old fox. Is he alive still? Somebody told me he was dead.'

'Surely,' replied Mrs. Exon; 'he is alive and hearty, except for his legs, poor man.'

'Oh, he's alive?—alive and hearty? I thought, perhaps—somebody told me—that he died—I forget how—six years ago, come October, it was. That's what they told me: six years ago, come October!'

'He had an accident, just about that time, six years ago. Perhaps that is what you are thinking of.'

'How the devil,' he asked, without taking any notice of this reply, 'can a live man have a ghost? How can a live man send his own ghost to travel all round the world? Won't he want his own ghost for himself sometimes?'

'He's got a touch of fever,' said the landlady, 'and it has gone to his head. You had better go home, my man, and lie down, if you have got a bed anywhere.'

'I want to know this,' he repeated earnestly, 'did anybody ever hear of a living man sending his ghost out on errands, to keep people awake and threaten things? It can't be—it isn't in Nature.'

Nobody could explain this fact, which was new to all. Mrs. Exon shook her head as if the questioner, being lightheaded, must be treated tenderly, and one of the men remembered a village ghost-story, which he began. Unfortunately for the Society of Psychical Research, that story was interrupted at its very commencement by this remarkable stranger.

'How did he do it, then?' he asked impatiently, banging the table with his fist. 'Tell me that? How did he do it?' Then he pulled himself together and became natural again.

'About his legs, now. What's the matter with Dan Leighan's legs?'

'Why, after his accident they began to fail him, and now he's paralysed, and never leaves his room, unless he's wheeled out of a fine morning. But hearty in appetite, and as for his head, it is as clear as ever, so they tell me. For my part, Joseph and me never had no doings with Mr. Leighan, and we don't want none.'

'What was his accident?'

'He fell from his pony coming home at night. Some say he was in drink; but then he was always a sober man, and I don't believe he was in drink, though perhaps he may have had a fit; because how else could he fall at all, and how should he fall so hard, right upon his head? Mr. George Sidcote it was that found him lying in the road. He was insensible for three days. When he came to, he couldn't remember nor tell anybody how the accident happened; but he said he'd been robbed, though his pocket was full of money, and his watch and chain hadn't been taken. Papers they were, he said, that he was robbed of. But there's many thinks he must have put those papers somewhere, and forgotten because of the knock on his head.'

'Oh!' The stranger rubbed his hands. 'I'm better now,' he said; 'I am much better. Out in Australia I caught a fever, and it gives me a shock now and again. Much better now. So—old Dan Leighan fell from his pony—he had an accident, and fell—from his pony—on his head—and was senseless for three days, and was robbed of papers? Now who could have robbed him of papers? Were they valuable papers?'

'Well, that I cannot say. You've had your brandy, and it's an expensive drink for the likes of you, my man. You'd best pay for it and go. It's a good five mile to Bovey.'

'Ay, I'll pay for it and go. He lost papers, and he was insensible for three days, and he can't remember—ho! ho! He can't remember—ho! ho! ho!'

Did you ever see a man in an hysterical fit? It is pretty bad to look at a woman laughing and crying with uncontrolled and uncontrollable passion, but it is far worse to see a man. This strong, ragged man, seized with an hysterical fit, rolled about upon the bench laughing and crying. Then he stood up to laugh, rolling his shoulders, and crying at the same time; but his laugh was not mirthful, and his crying was a scream, and he staggered as he laughed. Then he steadied himself with one hand on the table; he caught at another man's shoulder with the other hand; and all the time, while the villagers looked on open-mouthed, he laughed and cried, and laughed again, without reason apparent, without restraint, without mirth, without grief, while the tears coursed down his cheeks. Some of the men held him by force; but they could not stop the strong sobbing or the hiccuping laugh, or the shaking of his limbs. At last, the fit spent, he lay back on the settle, propped against the corner, exhausted, but outwardly calm and composed again.

'Are you better now?' asked the landlady.

'I've been ill,' he said, 'and something shook me. Seems as if I've had a kind of a fit, and talked foolish, likely. What did I say? what did I talk about?'

'You were asking after Mr. Leighan. Who are you? What do you want to know about Mr. Leighan? You asked after his health and his accident. And then you had a fit of hysterics. I never saw a man—nor a woman neither—in such hysterics. You'd best go home and get to bed. Where are you going to sleep? Where are you going to?'

'Where's your husband, Mrs. Exon? Where's Joseph?' he asked unexpectedly.

Mrs. Exon started and gasped.

'Joseph's gone to Bovey with the cart. He ought to have been home an hour ago. But who are you?'

'William Shears,' he turned to one of the men, 'you don't seem to remember me?'

'Why, no,' William replied, with a jump, because it is terrifying to be recognised by a stranger who has fits and talks about live men's ghosts. 'No; I can't rightly say I do.'

'Grandfather Derges,' he applied to the oldest inhabitant, who is generally found to have just outlived his memory, though if

you had asked him a week or two ago he could have told the most wonderful things. 'Grandfather Derges, don't you remember me?'

'No; I don't. Seems as if I be old enough to remember everybody. But my memory isn't what it was. No; I don't remember you. Yet, I should say, now, as you might belong to these parts because you seem to know my name.'

That did, indeed, seem a logical conclusion. Grandfather Derges therefore, had not outlived his reasoning faculties. Why, of course the stranger might belong to these parts. How else could he know Joseph Exon and William Shears and Grandfather Derges?

'I remember you, grandfather, when you used to cane the boys in church.'

'Ay, ay,' said the old man; 'so I did, so I did. Did I ever cane you, master? You must have a wonderful memory, now, to remember that.'

'Don't you remember me, William Clampit?' he asked a third man.

'No; I don't,' replied William shortly, as if he did not wish to tax his memory about a man so ragged.

Then they all gazed upon him with the earnestness of Mr. Pickwick's turnkeys taking their prisoner's portrait. Here was a man who knew them all, and none of them knew him. He had come from Lord knows where—he said Australia; he had talked the most wonderful stuff about dead people and live people; he had drunk neat brandy enough to make him drunk; and he had had a fit—such a fit as nobody had ever seen before. Now he was quiet and in his right senses, and he knew everybody in the room, except the strangers from Newton Abbot.

'I've been away a good many years,' he said, 'and I've come back pretty well as poor as when I left, and a sight more ragged. I didn't think that a beard and rags would alter me so that nobody should know me. Why, Mrs. Exon, does a man leave the parish every week for Australia that I should be so soon forgotten?'

He did not speak in the least like one of themselves. His manner of speech was not refined, it is true; but there are *nuances*, so to speak, which differentiate the talk of the masters from the talk of the rustics. He spoke like one of the masters. So in France, the *ouvrier* recognises the *bourgeois* by his speech, disguise him as you may.

'I have come back without anything, except a little money in my pocket. Now, Mrs. Exon, give me some bread and cheese for

supper; I've had no dinner. Being ill, you see, and shaken more than a bit, I didn't want my dinner. Then I'll have a pipe, and you shall tell me the news and all that has happened. Perhaps, by that time, you will find out who I am.'

When he had eaten his bread and cheese, he called for more brandy, this time with water, and began to smoke, showing no trace at all of his late fit. He talked about the parish, and showed that he knew everybody in it; he asked who had married, and who were dead; he inquired into the position and prospects of all the farms; he showed the most intimate acquaintance with everybody, and the greatest interest in the affairs of all the families. Yet no one could remember who he was.

About half-past nine the door was opened again. This time to admit Harry Rabjahns, the blacksmith, who had been finishing the choir practice with a little conversation, and was now thirsty.

He stepped in—a big strong man, with broad shoulders and a brown beard. His eyes fell upon the stranger.

'Good Lord!' he cried; 'it's Mr. David Leighan come back again, and him in rags!'

'So it is—it's Mr. David,' cried Mrs. Exon, clapping her hands. 'To think that none of us knew him at first sight! And that you should come to my house, of all the houses in the parish, first, and me not to know you!—oh, Mr. David!—me not to know you! and you in this condition! But you'll soon change all that; and I'll make up the bed for you—and your uncle and Miss Mary will be downright glad to see you. Mr. David! To think of my not knowing Mr. David!'

CHAPTER VIII.

A QUIET SUNDAY MORNING.

I SUPPOSE there is no place in the world more quiet than Challacombe on Sunday morning. All the men, all the boys, and all the girls, with some of the wives, are at church; and none but those who have babies are left at home. The very creatures in the meadows seem to know that it is Sunday, and lie restfully in their pastures. The quietest place in the whole parish I take to be Gratnor, because it lies off any of the lanes which lead to Moreton, Widdicombe, or Bovey Tracey. The farm occupies the Ridge, a name which applies to both summit and slopes of a long, projecting spur which runs eastward, narrow and steep, between the valley of the Becky and the valley of the Bovey. Standing on Hayne Down,

over against the Ridge, one can see how the ground breaks down with hill after hill, each lower than the other, until the Ridge itself abruptly falls into the lower Combe at Riddy Rock, where the waters meet. First, there is Easę Down; then, Manaton Tor next, Latchell; and, lastly, Nympenhole or Oddy Tor, with Gratnor Farm beyond these Tors, its fields and meadows showing among the trees like a clearance in some great primæval forest. No path—save the narrow and winding Water Lane, which leads either to the clam across the Bovey, and so to Lustleigh Cleeve, or else to Horsham Steps, and so to Foxworthy and North Bovey—passes near Gratnor. It is quiet enough every day in the week but then there are the sounds of labour, the ringing of the blacksmith's anvil, the wheels of a cart in the lane, the woodman's axe in the coppice, the voice of the ploughman in the field—all the year round some voice or sound of work; but on Sunday there is nothing except the quiet clucking of the hens and the self-satisfied quomp of the ducks, and the song of the birds from the woods of Latchell and Nympenhole.

I suppose that there was somebody left in the house—otherwise how should the Sunday roast and pudding be ready to time?—but when Mary had laid out the Bible and Prayer-book for her uncle to read the service of the day, with the weekly paper for him to take after the service, and had adjusted his cushions and left him, there was no sign or sound about the place of human creature. As for locking up houses, or shutting doors, for fear of thieves, Challacombe was like the realm of England under good King Alfred, when, as we know, gold crowns, and torquils, and bracelets, and the most precious carved horns, used to be hung out to ornament the hedges by ostentatious Thanes, and the casual tramp only sighed when he saw them and, at the worst, sinfully envied their possessor, and wished that he had been born seven hundred years later, when he might have consigned them safely to the nearest 'fence.'

Mr. Leighan read the morning service—litany, lessons, chants, psalms, and commandments, and the prayer for the Church militant here upon earth—quite through without omitting one single petition. He did this every Sunday as punctiliously as the captain of a Bombay liner. The claims and calls of religious duty satisfied, he lay back in his chair and gently closed his eyes, surrendering his whole mind to the blissful prospect of speedily foreclosing on Sidcote. The end of the year, he knew full well, and had made it all out clear on paper, would make an end of George, and put himself

in as owner of that farm as well as all the others. Truly, in the matter of land, he was as insatiable as King Picrochole. So pleasing was the imaginary possession of these acres, that he forgot the weekly newspaper, and continued to picture himself as the owner of Sidcote—alas! that he could no longer ride about the fields—until he dropped into a gentle slumber.

It was exactly twelve o'clock when he was suddenly startled by a man's step. He knew the step, somehow, but could not at the moment remember to whom it belonged. The man, whoever he was, knew his way about the place, because he came from the back, and walked straight, treading heavily, to the room where Mr. Leighan was sitting, and opened the door. It was David coming to call upon his uncle on his return. There was some improvement in his appearance. Joseph Exon had lent him certain garments in place of those he had worn the day before; the canvas trousers, for instance, had gone, and the terrible felt hat with the hole in the crown. His dress was now of a nondescript and incongruous kind, the sailor's jacket ill-assorting with the rustic corduroy trousers and waistcoat. He had no collar, and the red handkerchief was gone; his head and hair had been trimmed a bit, and he was washed. Yet, in spite of his improved dress, he preserved the air of one who belongs to the lower depths. It is quite terrible to observe with what alacrity most men sink. It is as if a lower level was natural for most of us. I saw the other day in a workhouse a man who had been—is still, I suppose—a clergyman of the Church of England. They employed him in attending to the engine fires; he stoked with zeal, no doubt with far greater zeal than he had ever shown in his pastoral duties, and he wore the workhouse uniform as if he liked it and was at home in it. David, who had been a person of consideration and a gentleman as gentlemen are reckoned at Challacombe, was now at his ease in the garb and appearance of a day-labourer. Had it not been for that spectre which haunted him every night, he would have been contented to end his days in Australia as a labourer paid by the job.

He threw open the door and stood confronting the man whom he had last seen dead, as he thought, killed by his own hand. He tried to face him brazenly, but broke down and stood before him with hanging head and guilty eyes.

'So,' said Daniel Leighan, 'it is David, come back again. We thought you were dead. They told me this morning that you were back again.'

'You hoped I was dead: say it out,' said David, with ropy voice.

'Dead or alive, it makes no difference to me. Stay: you were in my debt when you went away. Have you come to settle that long outstanding account?'

David stepped into the room and shut the door behind him.

'You have got something to say to me first,' he said, still in a ropy and husky voice. 'Have it out now, and get it over. Something you've kept dark, eh?'

'What do you mean?'

'Outside, they knew nothing about it. That was well done. No occasion to make a family scandal—and me gone away and all—was there?. Come, let us have it out, old man. Who robbed me of my land?'

His words were defiant, but his eyes were uneasy and suspicious.

'Say, rather, who fooled away his inheritance with drink and neglect?'

'Robbed me, I say!'

'If I had not bought your land, someone else would. If you've come home in this disposition, David, you had better go away again as soon as you please. Don't waste my time with foolish talk.'

'"David's gone," you said. "When he comes back, we'll have it out. We won't have a family scandal." Well, I am back. I thought you were dead.'

'I am not dead, as you see.'

'Well, go on. Say what you've got to say. I'll sit and listen. Come; I owe you so much. Pay it out, then.'

'David,' said his uncle quietly, 'drink has evidently driven you off your head. Family scandal? What was there to hide? Good Heavens! do you suppose that the whole of your life, with its profligacy and drunkenness, was not known to all the countryside? Why, your history is one long scandal. Things to hide? Why the whole parish were so ashamed of you that they rejoiced when you went away.'

David heard this speech with a kind of stupefaction.

'Nephew David,' his uncle went on, 'you may be sure that it was not my interest, considering that your land became mine, to hide anything to your discredit. It is a censorious world, but the worst of them can't blame my conduct towards you.'

It is, indeed, a censorious world, but it is remarkable how every man persuades himself that the fishiest of his doings cannot be handled severely even by the most censorious of his fellows. In this matter of David, now, they said very cruel things, indeed, about Daniel's conduct; and it was not true that the parish re-

joiced when David went away. Nor were they ashamed of him. Not at all; they knew him for a good-natured, easy-going young fellow, who gave freely when he had anything to give, drank freely, spent freely, and was only parsimonious in the matter of work; certainly, he stinted himself in that particular, which made his uncle's crafty plans the easier to carry through.

'The law protected you, David, and you had the full benefit of law. When you borrowed the money of me, little by little, and when you gave me a mortgage on your land, the law stepped in to prevent any undue advantage. It protected you. What I did was by permission of the law. Your case was decided in a London Court. I could not sell you up, and I was ordered to give you a term of six months, in which to pay principal or interest; failing that, I was permitted to foreclose without your having power of redemption. That is the law. You did not pay either interest or principal, and the land became mine. If you have any quarrel, it is with the law of this land, not with me.' Mr. Leighar made this statement in dry, judicial tones, which would have done credit to a Judge in Chancery. 'And that,' he concluded, 'is all I have to say to you, David. What are you staring like a stuck pig for?'

'Oh, Lord!' cried David, 'is it possible? What does he mean? Come, old man, don't bottle up. You can't do anything to me now, and I might do a great deal for you; I might, if you didn't bottle up and bear malice. Come—you and me know—let's have it out.'

'What do we two know? All I know is that you have been away for six years, that you come back in rags, that you had a fit of some kind last night up at Joseph Exon's, and that you drank brandy-and-water until you were well-nigh drunk. Have you got any account to give of yourself?'

'Don't bottle up,' David said feebly. 'There is nobody here but you and me. I'll own up. And then I can help you as nobody else can—if you don't bottle up. If you do—but why should you? What's the good? There's nobody here but you and me. What the devil is the good of pretending that there's nothing? Did you ever forgive anybody in your life? Do you think I believe you are going to forgive me—you, of all men in the world?'

'Lord knows what this man means! David,' he said impatiently, 'leave off this nonsense about hiding and pretending and inferring. One would think you had been murdering somebody!'

David sat down, staring with the blankest astonishment. He had by this time succeeded in impressing upon his brain the fixed

conviction that his uncle kept his murderous assault a secret out of regard for the family name; and he came prepared to be submissive, to express contrition, and to offer, in return for the secret being still kept, to give back to his uncle the long-lost box full of papers. And now, this conviction destroyed, he knew not what to think or what to say.

The one thing which would have appeared to him the most impossible had happened—that is, in fact, the thing which always does happen. Nothing is really certain except the impossible. As for what is only unexpected—which the French proverb says is certain—that naturally happens every day, and we only notice it when it is something disagreeable. For instance: There is a boy in a quiet country town; quite an unknown and obscure boy; born to be at best a small solicitor or a general practitioner in his native place. Behold! after a few years, this humble boy has become a popular novelist, a leader at the Bar, a great medical specialist, the best actor in the world, the best poet, the best dramatist of his time; or, it may be, the most accomplished villain, impostor, cheat, and ruffian. These are impossible things, and they are always happening. Happily, the impossible generally comes by degrees, which is merciful, because else we should all lose our reason in contemplation of the coming impossibilities. Ghosts are among the things impossible, which is at once the strongest argument for their existence, and the reason why their sudden appearance always produces staggers. No ghost in the world, or out of it, could have caused David Leighan such astonishment as the conduct of his uncle.

'It can't be!' he said, 'it can't be! Uncle, you are playing some deep game with me; though what game, seeing how useful I can be to you if I like, I can't understand. You are like a cat with a mouse. You are old, but you are foxy; you've got a game of your own to play, and you think you'll play that game low down. Come,' he made one more effort to ascertain if the impossible really had happened; 'come! It's like a game of bluff, aint it? But let's drop it, and play with the cards on the table. See now—here's my hand—I heard last night that you were alive and hearty, though I had every reason to think you were dead. I was quite sure you were dead—I *knew* you were dead. You know why I knew. Every night I was assured by yourself that you were dead. Come now! Well—when I heard that you were alive and hearty, I said to myself, "To-morrow I'll go and have it out with him when all the people are at church and there's nobody to listen"; because they told me you could not remember—you know what.'

'Couldn't remember? I'd have you to know, sir, that my memory is as good as ever it was. Couldn't remember?'

'Oh!' said David, 'then you do remember everything?'

'Of course I do.'

'Then, uncle, have it out.'

'What the devil do you mean?'

'Let us talk open. I've never forgotten it. I have said to myself over and over again, "I'm sorry I done it." I wished I hadn't done it, especially at night when your ghost came—who ever heard of a live man's ghost?'

'The man's stark staring mad!' cried Daniel.

'Come, now. Either say, "David, I forgive you, because there was not much harm done after all. I forgive you if you'll help me in the way that only you can help me," or else say, "David, I'll bear malice all the days of my life." Then we shall know where we are.'

'I don't understand one word you say. Stay!' A thought suddenly struck him. 'Stay! The last time I set eyes on you, it was on the morning that you left Challacombe, and on the same day that I met with my accident. The last time I set eyes on you was in this room. You cursed and swore at me. You went on your knees, and prayed the Lord in a most disrespectful manner to revenge you, as you put it. Do you wish me to forgive those idle words? Man alive! you might as well ask me to forgive last night's thunder. Reproach yourself as much as you please—I'm glad you've got such a tender conscience—but don't think I am going out of my way to bear malice because you got into a temper six years ago.'

'Then you *do* remember, uncle?' he said, with a sigh of infinite satisfaction. The impossible had really happened. 'Well, I thought you would remember, and bear malice. It was the last you saw of me, you see—and the last I saw of you.'

'Yes, it was the last I saw of you.'

David laughed, not the hysterical laugh of last night, but a low laugh of sweet satisfaction and secret enjoyment.

'Well, uncle, since you don't bear malice—Lord, I thought you'd be flying in my face!—there's no harm done, is there? And now we can be friends again, I suppose. And if it comes to foxiness, perhaps it will be my turn to play fox.'

'Play away, David; play away.'

'I've come home, you see.' David planted his feet more firmly, and leaned forward, one hand on each knee—'I've come home.'

'In rags.'

'In poverty and rags. I've got nothing but two or three pounds. When they are gone, perhaps before, I shall want more money. The world is everywhere full of rogues—quite full of rogues, besides land-thieves, like yourself, and there isn't enough work to go round. Mostly they live like you—by plundering and robbing.'

'Find work then. In this country, if you don't work you won't get any money. Do you think you are the more likely to get money out of me by calling names?'

'Well, you see, uncle, I think I shall find a way to get some money out of you.'

'Not one penny—not one penny, David, will you get!' There was a world of determination in Mr. Leighan when it came to refusing money.

'It's natural that you should say so, to begin with.' His manner had now quite changed. He began by being confused, hesitating, and shamefaced; he was now assured, and even braggart. 'I expected as much. You would rather see your nephew starve than give him a penny. You've robbed him of his land; you've driven him out of his house; and when he comes back in rags, you tell him he may go and starve.'

'Words don't hurt, David,' his uncle replied quietly. 'I am too old to be moved by any words. Now, if you have nothing more to say, go.'

David sat doggedly. He had always been dogged and obstinate. His uncle looked at him curiously, as if studying his character.

'David,' he said presently, 'you were a bad boy at school, where they ought to have flogged it out of you. You were a bad son to your father, who ought to have cut you off with a shilling. You were a bad farmer when you got your farm: you were a drunkard, a betting-man, and a sporting-man. If I hadn't taken your land, a stranger would have had it. Now it's kept in the family. Years ago I thought to give you a lesson, and, if you reformed, to give it back to you in my will. I now perceive that you are one of those who never reform. I have left it—elsewhere.'

'Go on,' said David; 'I like to hear you talk.'

'The old house at Berry—your old house—is turned into two cottages. One of those cottages is empty. If you mean to stay in the parish, you can live in it, if you like, rent free, for a time—that is, until you get into work again, or I find a tenant. If you choose to earn money, you can; there are always jobs to be done by a handy man. If you will not work, you must starve. Now that is

all I will do for you. When you are tired of Challacombe, you can go away again. That is my last word, nephew.' He turned away, and began to busy himself again among his papers.

'After the accident, and the loss of those papers, you were senseless for three days. And after that you got paralysis. Why, what was all this, but a judgment on you for your conduct to your own flesh and blood?'

'Rubbish!'

David said no more. Those best acquainted with him would have understood from the expression of his face that his mind was laboriously grappling with a subject not yet clear to him. He was, in fact, just beginning to be aware of a very foxy game which he might play with his uncle, though as yet he only dimly saw the rules of that game. It was a new game, too, quite one of his own invention, and one which would at the same time greatly please and stimulate his uncle, whom he meant to be his adversary. He said nothing more, but he sat doggedly, and tried to work out the rules of that game.

Presently Mary came home from church, and, with her, George Sidcote and myself. We found David sitting with his uncle, but the old man was reading the paper, and David was sitting silent, thinking slowly.

'Mary,' said David, 'you don't remember me, I suppose?'

'You are my cousin David. Of course I remember you, David; though you are altered a good deal.' She gave him her hand. 'All the people are talking about your return.'

Then George and I shook hands with him cheerfully and brotherly.

'Why, David,' said George, 'we must rig you out a little better than this. Come home with Will and me.'

David turned sullenly to his uncle.

'I've got one thing more to say. All of you may hear what that is. He offers me a labourer's cottage to live in, and a labourer's work to do, and a labourer's wage for pay, on my own lands—my own that he stole, this old man here, sitting struck by a judgment, in his chair. The next time I come here—you may all take notice and bear witness—the question shall not be how little I may be offered, but how much I shall take.'

So far had he got in this understanding of the game that was to be played.

'How much,' he repeated with a chuckle, 'how much I shall take.'

'Dear me!' said his uncle. 'This is very interesting! And how are you, Will? when did you come down? and how is your writing business? Take David away, George; I am afraid you'll find him very tedious—very tedious indeed.'

CHAPTER IX.

AT SIDCOTE.

We took David away with us; but the old man was right: he was insufferably tedious. To begin with, his mind seemed absorbed; he answered our questions shortly, and showed no curiosity or interest in us, and pretended no pleasure at seeing us again; he was lumpish and moody. In fact, though at the time one could not know, he was laboriously arranging in his mind the revenge which he was about to take upon his uncle; and he was not one of those men who can think of more than one thing at a time.

'Mother,' said George, 'I've brought David Leighan to dinner. He came home last night.'

The old lady gave him her hand, without the least appearance of surprise that David had returned in so tattered a condition. To be sure, Joseph Exon's kindly offices had made a difference, yet he looked rough and ragged still; his wanderings had clearly ended in failure.

'You are welcome, David,' she said. 'You will tell us after dinner some of your adventures. I hope you are come to settle again among your own people.'

'My own people,' he said, 'have been so kind, that I am likely to settle among them.'

'I will take David upstairs, mother,' said George, 'for a few moments; then we shall be ready.'

Everything at Sidcote looked as if it had always been exactly the same and had never changed. In winter, with the snow lying on the Tors and the lanes knee-deep in mud, Sidcote looked as if it was always winter. In the summer, with the old, old garden ablaze with flowers and the green apples turning red or yellow on the old branches, it seemed as if it must be always summer. In the parlour, where Mrs. Sidcote sat, the Bible before her, it seemed as if the dear old lady must have been always old and silver-haired—certainly she must always have been gentle and gracious. A farmer's daughter, a farmer's wife, and a farmer's mother—can such be a gentlewoman? It is borne in upon me, my brothers, more and more, and the longer I live, that gentleness doth not consist in

gentle blood. Some noble lords there are of whom one has heard —but the thing may be false—that they are mere ruffians, devourers, and tramplers upon virtue and fair honour; some noble ladies, it is whispered—but, indeed, I know them not—are mere seekers of pleasure, selfish, frivolous, and heartless. Whereas, certainly in all ranks of life there are those who naturally follow the things which make for unselfishness, sweetness, sacrifice, and well-doing. Mrs. Sidcote was one of these. A little pleasant-voiced and pleasant-looking dame—now sixty years old or thereabouts, who will, I make no manner of doubt, live to be ninety-five at least.

The window of her room looks upon the garden, which is, as I have said, ancient, and full of old trees and old-fashioned flowers, set and planted in antique fashion. The house is old, too—built of stone, with low rooms—two-storied, and thatched. Between the house and the road is the farm yard, so that one cannot get to the garden-gate without taking observation of George's pigs and poultry.

When they came downstairs, David presented a little more of his old appearance. There remained a certain slouching manner which suggested the tramp, and the sidelong look, half of suspicion, half of design, which is also common to the tramp; but as yet we knew nothing of his past life and adventures. George had fitted him with a clean shirt and collar—it is only at such times that one recognises the great civilizing influence of the white collar—a necktie, socks—actually, he had not worn socks, he casually told George, for five years—a pair of boots, somewhat too large for him, because George's size of boots was proportionate to his length of limb; and a pocket-handkerchief. The pocket-handkerchief is even a greater civilizing influence than the collar. It is not in sight, and yet if one has a pocket-handkerchief one must necessarily—one cannot choose otherwise—live up to it. But a change of clothes does not immediately produce a change of manners; it takes time for the collar and the handkerchief to work: David looked moody and resentful.

When he was dressed he sat down to dinner.

Then it was that we made a very painful discovery. Our friend, we found, had entirely forgotten the simplest rules of manners—the very simplest. It was clear that he must have gone down very low indeed in the social scale in order to get at those habits which he now exhibited. Were they acquired in the Pacific, or in Australia, or in America, where, as we afterwards learned, David had spent

his years of exile? I think in none of these places, because, though there are plenty of unsuccessful Englishmen everywhere, it is not reported that they make haste to throw off the manners of decent folk. He lost his manners because he had lost his self-respect; which is a very different thing from losing your money. Let us refrain from details, and observe only in general terms that he helped himself to food with fingers as well as with fork. After all, fingers came before forks, which is the reason why forks have four prongs. It shall suffice to mention that, the principal dish being a pair of roast fowls, he munched the bones and threw them on the floor; that he helped himself, with a wolfish haste, as if there was not enough to go round, and every man must grab what he could; and, like a savage or a wild beast, he looked about him jealously while he was eating, as if someone might snatch his food from him. During the operation of taking his food he said nothing, nor did he reply if he was addressed; and he ate enough for six men; and he drank as if he would never get tired of George's cider, which is an excellent beverage, but deceptive if you are so ill-advised as to think it has no strength.

The old lady began to question him; but David either did not hear, being wholly engrossed with his feeding, or else was too sulky and bearish to reply. Therefore she ceased to try; and we all sat looking on with pallid cheeks and ruined appetites, pretending not to notice that our guest had become a savage. Can one ever forget the way in which that delicate currant-and-raspberry pie—in London, they call it 'tart'—was, with its accompaniment of cream, dainty, rural, and poetical, mercilessly wolfed by this greedy Orson? As soon as possible, Mrs. Sidcote, who usually sat and talked a while after dinner, withdrew, and left us to battle with our guest.

After dinner, George produced a bottle of port.

'There is not much left,' he said with a sigh. 'My father's cellar is nearly finished; but it will last my time. We will drink the last bottle together, Will, on my last day in Sidcote.'

At all events, we drank very little of that bottle, for David clutched the decanter, poured out a tumbler full, drank it off, and then another tumbler. Now, two tumblers full of port, after a quart or so of cider, is a good allowance for any man. When David had taken his second tumbler, he made as if he would say something. Perhaps he had it in his mind to say something gracious, for his lips moved, but no voice was heard. Then he got up and reeled to the sofa, on which he threw himself like a log, and was asleep in a moment. He was like an animal filled with food, who

must sleep it off. It was remarkable that he lay in the attitude most affected by the sleeping tramp—namely, on his face. You will generally find the tramp who rests by the wayside, sleeping with his face on his arms. Perhaps because this position affords more rest in a short time than any other; perhaps because it saves the shoulders from the hardness of the ground. David, therefore, lay in this attitude, and breathed heavily.

'We have not had much of the bottle, have we, old man?' said George. 'Never mind; let us go into the garden and have a pipe in the shade.'

We took chairs with us, and sat in the old-fashioned garden of Sidcote, under a gnarled and ancient apple-tree.

'Our David,' I said, 'was always inclined to be loutish. He has been developing and cultivating that gift for six years—with a pleasing result.'

'There is something on his mind,' said George. 'Perhaps he will tell us what it is; perhaps not. David was never particularly open about himself. Strange that he should begin by looking for his uncle's grave! Why did he think that he was dead?'

'He believed what he hoped, no doubt.'

'In the evening, Harry Rabjahns tells me, he had a kind of fit—an hysterical fit of laughing and crying—in the inn.'

'That was, perhaps, because he had learned that his uncle was still alive.'

This was indeed the case, though not in the sense I intended.

'And this morning, the first day of his return, he begins with a row with his uncle. Well, there is going to be mischief at Gratnor.'

'Why, what mischief can there be?'

'I don't know. David went away cursing his uncle. After six years he comes back cursing him again. When a man broods over a wrong for six years, mischief does generally follow. First of all, the old man will do nothing for him. Do you understand that? There was a solid obstinacy in his eyes while he listened to David. Nothing is to be got out of him. What will David do?'

'He will go away again, I suppose; unless he takes farm work.'

'David is as obstinate as his uncle. And he is not altogether a fool, although he did take to drink and ruined himself. And there will be mischief.'

'George, old man, I return to my old thought. If you and Mary marry without old Dan's consent, her fortune goes to David. Does David know?'

'I should think not.'

'To which of the two would the old man prefer to hand over that money?'

'To Mary, certainly.

'So I think. Then don't you see that some good may come out of the business, after all?'

'It may come, but too late to save Sidcote. He means to have Sidcote: my days here are numbered. Well, it is a pity, after five hundred years.' He looked around at the inheritance about to pass away from him—only a farm of three hundred acres, but his father's and his great-great-grandfather's—and he was silent for a moment. 'As for work, what would I grudge if I could keep the old place! But I know that over at Gratnor there sits, watching and waiting his chance, the man who means to have my land, and will have it before the end of the year.'

'Patience, George. Anything may happen.'

'He is a crafty and a dangerous man, Will. We can say here what we cannot say in Mary's presence. He is more crafty and more dangerous now that he is paralysed, and cannot get about among his fields, than he was in the old days. He cannot get at me by the same arts as he employed for David. He cannot persuade me to drink, and to sign agreements and borrow money when I am drunk. But the bad times have done for me what drink did for David.'

So we talked away the afternoon, in a rather gloomy spirit. Life is no more free from sharks in the country than in the town; there are in Arcadia, as well as in London, vultures, beasts, and birds of prey, who sit and watch their chance to rend the helpless.

'And so,' he said, summing up, 'I shall have to part with the old family place, and begin the world again; go out as David went out, and return, perhaps, as he returned.'

'No, George; some things are possible, but not probable. That you should come back as David has come back is not possible.'

At that moment the man of whom we spoke came slowly out of the house, rubbing his eyes.

'When you are among the blacks,' he said, 'you never get enough to eat. And as for their drink, especially the stuff they call orora, it is enough to make a dog sick.'

'Then you have been among the blacks, David?' It was the first hint he had given of his adventures.

He lighted his pipe and began to smoke it lazily, leaning against the porch. Then he talked, with intervals of puffing at the pipe.

'Six years ago,' he said, 'six years it was come October the twentieth, that I left Challacombe with fifty pounds for all the money I had in the world. Yes—fifty pounds, instead of Berry Down that I'd begun with. Who'd got the land?' He pointed in the direction of Gratnor with a gesture which was meant for hatred and unforgiveness. 'Ha! after I went away it seems that he had an ugly accident. No one knows the cause of that accident.' He grinned as if he was pleased to think of it. 'Quite a judgment—quite. A clear judgment, I call it. Where did I go first, now? I took passage at Falmouth for New York, and there I stayed; it's a fine town for them as have got money, full of bars and drinking-saloons, and—and—all sorts of pretty things. So I stayed there till all the money was gone—what's the good of fifty pounds? Better enjoy it, and have done with it. I made it last a good bit—two months and more. Then I looked about for work. Well; it's a terrible hard place when you've got no money, and as for work, the Irish get all there is. By that I'd made a few friends, and we thought we'd go westwards. There was a dozen or more of us, and we moved on together, sometimes getting odd jobs, sometimes legging it, and sometimes taking the cars. When there was no work, and I don't know that any of them were anxious—not to say *anxious*—to get work, we tramped around among the farms, and sometimes among the houses where the women are left all alone, and the men go off to town. It isn't easy for a woman to say "No" when a dozen men come to the door and there isn't another man within a mile. Sometimes we would go to a saloon and play monty. Sometimes we would do a trade. My pals were a clever lot, and I often wonder why they took me with them. A clever lot, they were. But the band got broken up by degrees. One got shot for kissing a farmer's wife; and another got hanged for stealing a horse; and another got his two legs amputated after a row over the cards. The odd thing was'—here David looked inexpressible things—'that all the men had done something, except me. That was curious, now. You wouldn't expect in this country, if you met a gang of tramps, that they'd all done something, would you? All but me. They were anxious to know what I'd done. I told them what I ought to have done, and they agreed with me. Some of them were for my going home at once and doing it. Well, it might have been a year, and it might have been more, before those of us who were left found ourselves at San Francisco, where we parted company. I couldn't settle down very well—I don't know why. If a man begins

wandering he keeps on wandering, I suppose. How can a man settle down who's got no land of his own to settle on? So I—I moved on, after a bit. It was a pity to part when one had made friends, but there—it couldn't be helped.'

He stopped at this point, to collect himself, I suppose. Or perhaps to consider what portions of his autobiography would be best repressed. We looked at each other in amazement. By his own statement—it was not a confession: there was no sense of shame about the man—by his own unblushing statement he had, only a few weeks after leaving England, where he had once been a substantial yeoman, the companion and equal of respected, honourable men, willingly consorted with a gang of roughs, who had all 'done something,' and gone with them tramping along the roads of the States! How can a man fall so quickly?

'Well,' David resumed, 'I was bound to move on somewhere. Presently, I heard of a ship that was going to the Pacific, and I went aboard as carpenter, and we sailed about. It wasn't a lucky ship, and she was wrecked one night in a storm, and all hands lost—except me. At least, I suppose so, because I never saw nor heard of any of them afterwards. I was thrown ashore on an island called, as I learned afterwards, New Ireland, and the people were going to spear me and eat me, when a German saved my life. Baron Sergius something, his name was. He could talk their language, and they worshipped him. I stayed there—perhaps a year—there's no way of telling how the time goes. Then a ship came, and took me off. The Baron was left behind, and I dare say he's eaten by this time. This ship was unlucky, too; the Captain set fire to her one night, and we had to take to the boats, where they were all starved to death, except the mate and me——'

'Good Lord!' cried George, 'here are adventures enough for a volume; and he reels them off as if they were quite common occurrences!'

'They picked us up, and brought us to Sydney; we had bad weather on the way, and were like to have foundered——'

'Do you always bring disaster to every vessel that you go aboard of?' I asked.

'But we got in safe and—and—well, that's all; I came home.'

'And what are you going to do, now you are come home, David?'

'I will tell you, George, in a day or two. The old man says he will do nothing for me—we'll see to that presently. He's turned the old farm-house at Berry into two cottages, and the buildings

are falling to pieces. Says I can take up my quarters in one of the cottages, if I like: that is liberal, isn't it? And I am to earn my living how I can: that's generous, isn't it?'

'Try conciliation, David.'

'No, Will; I think I know a better plan than conciliation.'

This was all that David told us. We saw, indeed, very little of him after this day. He took what we gave him without a word of thanks, and he did not pretend the least interest in either of us or our doings or our welfare. Yet he had known both of us all his life, and he was but five or six years older. A strange return! Knowing now all that I know, I am certain that he was dazed and confounded, first at finding his uncle alive, and next at the reception he met with. He was thinking of these things and of that new plan of his, yet imperfect, by which he could wreak revenge upon his uncle. This made him appear duller and more stupid than was his nature.

We sat waiting for more experiences, but none came. How, for instance, one would have been pleased to inquire, came an honest Devonshire man to consort with a gang of fellows who had all 'done something,' and were roving and tramping about the country ready to do something else? Before David lost his land, he used to drink, but not with rogues and tramps. Yet now he confessed without any shame to having been their companions—a tramp and vagabond himself, and the associate of rogues. By what process does a man descend so low in the short space of two or three weeks as to join such a company? I looked curiously at his face; it was weather-beaten and bronzed, but there was no further revelation in the lowering and moody look.

'I dare say,' he went on, 'that you were surprised when I came to look for his grave?'

'It is not usual,' I said, 'to ask for the graves of living men.'

'I was so certain that he was dead,' he explained, 'that I never thought to ask. Quite certain I was; why'—here he stopped abruptly—'I was so certain, that I was going to ask what it was he died of. Yes; I wanted to know how he was killed.'

'You said someone told you that he was dead. Who was that?'

'I will tell you now, not that you will believe me; but it is true. He told me himself that he was dead.'

'I do not say, David, that this is impossible, because men may do anything. Permit me to remark, however, that you were in America, and your uncle was in England. That must have made it difficult for your uncle to talk with you.'

'That is so,' he replied. 'What I mean is, that every night—it began after I'd been in New York and got through my money—every night, after I went to sleep, his cursed ghost used to come and sit on my bed. "David," he said, "I'm dead." A lot more he said that you don't want to hear. "David, come home quick," he said. "David, I'll never leave you in peace until you do come home," he said. Every night, mind you. Not once now and again, but every night. That's the reason why I came home. The ghost has left off coming now.'

'This is truly wonderful.'

'What did he do it for?' asked David angrily. 'He'd got my land. Well, as for—as for—what happened, my score wasn't paid off by that——'

'What did happen?'

'Never mind. He'd got my land still; and I was a tramp. What did he want to get by it?'

'You don't mean, David, that your uncle deliberately haunted you every night? No one ever heard of a living man's ghost haunting another living man. A dead man's ghost may haunt a living man, perhaps, though I am not prepared to back that statement with any experiences of my own. Perhaps, too, a living man's ghost may haunt a dead man; that would be only fair. Turn and turn about, you see. But for a live uncle to haunt a live nephew—no, David, no.'

'He is crafty enough for anything. I don't care who done it,' said David; 'it was done. Every night it was done. And that's why I came home again. And since he's fetched me home on a fool's errand, he's got to keep me.'

'But it wasn't his fault that the ghost came. Man alive! he wanted his own ghost for himself. Consider, he couldn't get on without it!'

'He brought me home, and he's got to keep me,' said David doggedly. Then he put on his hat and slowly slouched away.

'He is going to drink at the inn,' said George. 'I am glad he had the grace not to get drunk here. Well, there is something uncanny about the man. Why should he have this horrible haunting dream every night?'

'Remorse for a crime which he wished he had committed, perhaps. An odd combination, but possible. If he had murdered his uncle he might have been haunted in this way. Wishes he had murdered him, you see. Imagination supplies the rest.'

'My opinion, Will, is that in the band of pals tramping across

the North American Continent the exception spoken of by David did not exist. They had all, everyone, without exception, "done something." And now, lad, we'll walk over to Gratnor, and have tea with Mary.'

CHAPTER X.

GRIMSPOUND.

On the next day, Monday, a very singular and inexplicable thing happened—nay, two singular things—the full meaning of which I did not comprehend until accident—old-fashioned people would call it Providence—put the solution into my hands.

There is one place near Challacombe which those love most who know it best. Especially is it desirable when the air is still, and the sun burns in the valley, and in the narrow lanes around the slopes and outer fringe of the great moor. For my own part, it is like a holy place of pilgrimage, whither one goes time after time, and never tires of it, for refreshment of the soul and the eye. I left Sidcote at eight, before the morning freshness was quite gone from the air, though the sun at the end of July had then already been up for four hours, and followed the road which leads through Heytree Gate past Heytree Farm on the left, and the coppice on the right, where there was a solitary chiffchaff singing all by himself on the top of a tree. The road leads to Widdicombe-on-the Moor—the last place in these islands where the Devil appeared visibly, having much wrath, before he sent the lightning upon the church and killed many of the congregation. After Heytree, the road runs for the best part of a mile over the open down where Mr Leighan met his accident, until one comes to Hewedstone Gate, where there is another farmhouse, and where he who would stand upon the place of which I speak must turn to the right and follow the stream, which soon grows narrower until it becomes a trickling rill falling down a steep hillside, and the rill becomes a thread of water, and the hill grows steeper, and the thread disappears and becomes a green line leading to still greener quags, higher and higher up the hills. It is an immense great hog's back of a hill, three miles long from end to end; the ridge at the top is not steep and narrow, but half a mile broad at least, covered with heath and heather and whortleberry bushes. There is no path across Hamil Down, but this flat plain is the most glorious place in the world—even better than the long ridge of Malvern—to walk along on a warm summer day. The turf, before you reach the top, is dry and

spongy to the tread ; it is covered with the little yellow flowers of the tormentilla ; here and there is gorse with its splendid yellow, and among the gorse you may find the pretty pink blossoms of the dodder, if you look for it. If you climb higher the wind begins to whistle in your ears, which is the first sign of being upon a mountain side. You may sit on Primrose Hill all the year round, and the wind will never convert your ear into an Eolian harp ; but climb the side of Helvellyn or walk over the Sty Head Pass, and before you have gone very far, the old familiar ringing whistle begins, though the air below seemed still and the breeze had dropped. When you have reached the top, turn to the right and walk to King's Tor, the northern point of Hamil Down, and then sit down. There was a barrow here once, and at some unknown time it was opened, and now lies exposed and desecrated. Within is the round grave, cased with stones brought up the hill from below and ranged in a cuplike shape, in which they laid the body of the great, illustrious, and never-to-be-forgotten king. I will show you presently the place where he died, from which they brought him in long procession—the men and women alike long-haired, fair-skinned, and ruddy-cheeked—all mourning and lamenting. I know not the tunes of the hymns they sang, but I fear there was sacrifice at the grave-side, and that the soul of that king was accompanied by many indignant souls of those who were slain to bear him company. It was a long time ago, however, and the thing itself wants confirmation ; wherefore, let us shed no tears. They have laid open the grave and taken away the torquils, bracelets, and crown of the king. Then, if there were any bones of him, they left them uncovered, so that the rains fell upon them and the frosts tore them apart, and now there is but a little dust, which you cannot distinguish from the earth that lies around the grave. It is a high place, however, and beside it are boulders, where one can sit and look around. On the north-east is Ease Down, with its long slopes and the granite pile upon its highest point ; and below Ease Down, Manaton Tor ; above the church, and below Manaton, a spur runs out between the valleys, and there are Latchell Tor, Nympenhole, and the Ridge. Below Nympenhole stands Gratnor, where Mary is at this moment. I know it well, and I can fancy that I see her making a fruit-pie for dinner and a cake for tea. I am sure that she has a white apron on—one of the long things up to the throat —her sleeves are rolled up, and she stands before the board with the rolling-pin and the pastry, taking great pains with the cake, because we are going to Gratnor to have tea with her, and after tea

we shall walk along the Ridge and talk. Poor Mary! must she give up Challacombe and Sidcote, and go far afield with George in search of kinder fortune?

Beyond Manaton Tor you look down upon the rocky sides of Lustleigh Cleeve; turning your head to the east and south-east there rises before you a glorious pile of hills, one beyond the other. I say not that they are mountains, but I want no fairer hills. There is Hayne Down, with its boulders thrown down the front as if they were pebbles shaken from a young giant maiden's apron—this is, I believe, the scientific and geological explanation of their origin; there is Hound Tor, with its granite castle; behind it Hey Tor, with its two great black pyramids; on the right of Hey Tor there are Rippin Tor and Honeybag. Six miles away, hidden among the hills and woods, is Widdicombe Church, the cathedral of the moor. Turn to the west, and eight miles away you can see Kes Tor, where still stand the foundations of the houses built by those who placed the boulders in a circle, and filled them in with turf, and then, with branches and a larch-pole and more turf, made the place weather-tight and snug. With no chimney, and a cheerful fire of crackling sticks and plenty of smoke, they made themselves truly comfortable on winter nights, though somewhat red and inflamed about the eyes in the morning. South of Kes Tor there stretches the open moor, bounded by more tors in every direction. We are among the everlasting hills. A thousand years in their sight is but as yesterday. As these tors stand now, the grass climbing slowly over the rocks, so they stood a thousand years ago—the grass a few inches lower down, the rocks the same, the slopes the same. Overhead a hawk poised, just as one sees now; the rabbits ran about the heather, just as they do now; and, as now, the shifting shadows coursed across the slopes, and the curves of the hillsides changed continually as the sun like a giant rejoiced to run his course. We come and go, and are no more seen; but the hills remain. I suppose that after millions of years they too will disappear, with the light of the sun, and the sweet air, and the green herbs, and flowers, and all the creatures; and then there will be darkness and death for all creation. But the Hand which started the myriads of worlds and set them steadfast in their orbits can re-create them and make a newer and a better world, of which this is but a shadow.

There was not a soul upon Hamil Down except myself. There never is, except sometimes about this season when the whortleberries are ripe, or when a shepherd comes in search of his Dart-

moor flocks, or a wayfarer crosses from Challacombe over the hill, instead of coming round the road; or when one comes this way who knows the moor, and is not afraid of being belated, and ventures to make a short cut from Post Bridge—built of three flat slabs of stone by the nameless King who was buried on this tor—by way of Vitifer to Challacombe or Moreton Hampstead.

I had the whole of the great flat ridge to myself as I left King's Tor and walked briskly southwards, avoiding the green quagmires which lie here and there, a pitfall to the many. Half-way along this upland plain there stands an upright stone. It is not a cross; nor is it, so far as one can judge, a tombstone. It is simply an upright stone of gray granite, six feet high. Beside it lies a small flat stone; it is called the Gray Wether. Who put it up, and why it is put up, not the oldest inhabitant can tell. Indeed, the oldest inhabitant, who was the last survivor in Grimspound, died there about two thousand years ago, and there has been no oldest inhabitant since then.

I stood beside the Gray Wether Stone, making these and other admirable reflections. I am not quite certain whether I really did make them; but when one is a writer of leading articles, it is easy to fall into a literary way of thinking, and to shape one's thoughts into an effective line. However, I was shaken out of my meditations by a very singular accident. I had stood on the same spot dozens of times before this: any day the same accident might have happened. Yet it did not. The accident waited, as accidents always do, until it might produce a coincidence. No one can explain coincidences; yet they happen continually—to every one of us who is on the watch, one or two every day.

What happened was this. Between the upright stone and the flat stone, the edges of the latter being irregular, there is, at a certain place, an aperture or recess.

I carried with me a stick, on which I was leaning. Now, by this kind of chance which we call accident, in changing my position I stuck the point of the stick into the aperture—a thing of which one would have been hardly conscious but for an unmistakable clicking which followed, as of coins. Is there anything in the world which more excites and stimulates the blood than the discovery of hidden treasure? In ancient countries there are men who go about for ever haunted with the idea of finding hidden treasure—in Italy, in Syria, in Greece, in Asia Minor—wherever ancient civilizations have passed away, leaving drachmas, or shekels, in buried pots, waiting for the lucky finder. One

shudders to think of the eagerness with which I fell upon this imaginary hoard. No doubt, I hastened to conjecture, it was an ancient treasure which I was about to discover: a pile of Roman coins with the head of some almost forgotten Emperor upon them; a heap of early Saxon coins—angels, marks, doubloons, rose nobles at the very least. The opening, I found, was too small for a man's hand—perhaps a small six-and-a-quarter might have got in. If Mary were here—but Mary's hand is six-and-a-half, as becomes the hand of the capable housewife. If man's fingers were longer, like those of the monkey with the prehensile tail, one of our ancestors might have found and fished out the coins in no time, and spent them recklessly in Kentish cobs, or the home-grown crab. Perhaps the flat stone might be moved? No; the hands which propped up the Gray Wether were mighty hands; perhaps the same which threw that apronful of boulders over the face of Hayne Down. The flat stone was immovable. Perhaps with the stick I could at least feel the coins? Yes, I made them rattle. The position now became that of Tantalus. Who ever heard before of a buried treasure only twelve inches deep which could be felt but not dragged out? Why, it was not only a buried treasure, but perhaps a vast treasure; a collection of priceless coins, antique, unique, throwing light upon dark places in history; giving personality and life to what had been before but a name or a string of names, the portraits and effigies of long-forgotten emperors and kings. I would have that treasure somehow. Many plans suggested themselves: sticky stuff on the end of a twig to which the coins might adhere, lazy tongs, common tongs, pincers—I would go back to Sidcote and lug up a sackful of instruments; I would go to Moreton Hampstead and borrow another sackful of surgical instruments; I would even get a couple of stonemasons and saw that stone through. I would have that treasure.

One would not be without a conscience, but it sometimes sadly interferes with the pilgrim when paths of pleasantness open out before him; and here the voice of conscience said in her cold and unsympathetic way: 'There is no rood of English ground but has its Seigneur. The Lord of the Manor in which stands Hamil Down is the Prince of Wales. After all your trouble you will have to take the treasure to H.R.H.' 'I'll be hanged if I do,' was the reply of the natural man. 'You'll be conveyed to the Peninsula of Purbeck marble if you don't,' said conscience again.

It is no use arguing with a conscience which is at once persistent and sensitive. I, therefore, grumpily stuck the stick once more into

the recess and poked about again. The coins rattled merrily. Never in my whole life had I so ardently desired to touch, to handle, to examine, to possess an unknown and unseen treasure.

Now, when I took out the stick again, a bit of yellow leather showed for a moment just hooked up by the ferrule as far as the light penetrated. The sight of the leather inspired me with faint hope. Again I poked about, but for some time in vain, until I hit upon a most ingenious and crafty contrivance. Like all really great things it was also perfectly simple. In fact, I reversed the stick and fished with the handle, to such good purpose that in a very few moments I had the leather thong in my fingers and hauled it out.

The thong tied up the mouth of a small brown canvas bag, very much like that which is used by moderns in sending and fetching money from a bank. Did the Druids—did the ancient inhabitants of Grimspound—use canvas bags for their banks? Or perhaps the Romans, from whom we have borrowed so many things, invented the canvas bag for the convenience of bank clerks. It had an ancient and a musty smell, not unexpected in a bag, perhaps, as old as King Cymbeline or Queen Boduque. And the coins were within. Now for the treasure. Yet it must go to H.R.H., even if it should prove to be—what? As the sailor said when he found the bottle, 'Rum, I hope; sherry, I think;' so I: 'Roman, I hope; mediæval, I think; modern, by George!' Yes, the coins were modern; they were not Roman, or Saxon, or Norman, or early English; they were not even rose nobles, marks, moidores, or doubloons: they were simply sovereigns, twenty in number, and two of them quite new, bearing the date of 1879. The date of the bag, therefore, could not be later than that year. It might have been dropped in the day before yesterday. Perhaps, however, there were more. No; the firm point of the stick struck against the hard stone all round the narrow recess, but there were no more coins. The bag was a modern bank-bag, and the treasure was a collection of twenty coins all the same—namely, that Victorian gold-piece which is now so scarce and so highly prized in country districts, known as the sovereign. It was possible, indeed, that the Druids, who are supposed to have known so much, may have had a prophetic Mint, and turned out these coins in anticipation of later times; but no: the theory seemed untenable.

Twenty sovereigns in a bag—a bank-bag—a modern brown canvas bag. Who could have climbed up Hamil Down in order to hide twenty pounds in a little hole like this? Was it some philosopher careless of filthy lucre? No; in this country such a thinker

exists no longer. Even the Socialists would divide equally among themselves—one man 'laying low' to rob his neighbour of his share—and not throw away this creature of good red gold. Had it been placed there by someone as a voluntary offering and gift to the unknown God of Fortune in order to avert his wrath, by some man over-prosperous, as the rich king of old threw his ring into the sea? That might have been before the year 1879 : since that time there has been nobody prosperous. Could it have been hidden there by a thief? But if thieves steal a bag of money, it is the bag, and not the money, that they hide away. The money they take to a ken or a den, where their fraternity meet to enjoy the fruits of industry. No thief, certainly, concealed the bag in this place. It must, therefore, have been put there and hidden away by somebody for some secret purpose of his own. But what purpose? Who could possibly have brought a bag of twenty pounds to this wild spot, so distant from any place of human resort, and yet exposed to such an accident of discovery? Perhaps it was a magpie; in which case it only remained to find the maid. Only six years ago; perhaps less. Twenty pounds is a large sum to put away. Assuredly there was no one at all in the neighbourhood of Hamil Down by whom twenty pounds could be 'put away' without 'feeling it,' as is poetically and beautifully said. Twenty pounds! I kept counting the money, turning it over from hand to hand, looking again at the dates on the coins, and trying to think how this money came here, and why it could have been left here.

Finally, I put the gold into the bag, tied it up again, and put it in my own pocket. Then I walked on, my beautiful literary meditations quite interrupted, and turned from a peaceful stream into a muddy and angry whirlpool. One does not like to be faced with a conundrum which cannot be solved, and yet will not be quiet, but keeps presenting itself. In the fable of the king who was chased by the gadfly, it is cunningly figured how a man went mad by trying to solve an enigma of which he could not find the answer, but which would never cease to trouble him.

Thinking of this curious 'cache,' I went on walking mechanically, till I found myself at the other side of the broad upland down. The sun by this time, which was eleven o'clock, was blazing hot, and I thought with yearning of rest and a pipe in the shade. The nearest shade accessible was across the shallow valley at my feet, and under the rocks of Hooknor opposite. Not quite halfway across, I saw the long gray line which I knew to be part of the enclosure of Grimspound, on the lower slope of Hamil Down.

Beyond Grimspound the ground began to rise with a gentle ascent to Hooknor, where I proposed to rest. The way down which I plunged is encumbered with quagmires, and is steep and rocky; a hillside where adders hiss—I never, for my own part, heard this creature hiss, or clap its hands, or do anything except get out of the way as quickly as it could—and where rabbits also spring up at your feet and scud away as if they had heard of rabbit-pie. Presently, however, I found myself within the ancient and honourable city of Grimspound, which has been in ruins for sixty generations of human beings. Sixty generations! It seems a great many. We who are the heirs of all the ages, possess, as may be reckoned, so many ancestors of that period that they may be set down by the figure one, followed by eighteen naughts, which is about a hundred million times the whole population of the globe at that time. The difference is caused by the marriage of cousins.

Dartmoor has many of these ancient enclosures and sacred circles with avenues of stones, menhirs, dolmens, pierced stones, and other holy apparatus of a long-forgotten cult. Grimspound, which is the largest of them, is a great oblong, surrounded by what was once a strong wall, formed by rolling the boulders down the hill and piling them one above the other. The wall is now thrown over. Outside the wall was once a broad ditch or fosse, which is now nearly filled up. Within the wall are a dozen small circles formed of stones laid side by side. They are the foundations of houses, like those of Kes Tor. The largest circle was doubtless the Royal Palace, or perhaps the sacred building of the priest, where he sat in solitary grandeur when he was not conducting some beautiful and awe-inspiring human sacrifice. The small circles were the habitations of the nobility and gentry of Grimspound. The common sort had to make their huts without any circles, because the stones were all used up. The Grimspounders had no enemies, because on this island everybody spoke the same language and they were all cousins. But man's chief happiness is war and fighting; therefore, they pretended to be at feud with all the other tribes, and so went foraging and driving the cattle, and attacked and were attacked, and had their great generals and their valiant captains—to every tribe its Achilles and Diomede, and Nestor and Ulysses—just as their successors. All this fully accounts for Grimspound, and makes that place deeply interesting. At the same time, if any gentleman has a little pocket theory of his own about the origin and history of the place, we shall be pleased to hear him. The late ingenious Mr. James Fergusson, for instance, wrote a whole book

to prove that Grimspound and its brother stone cities were all built the day before yesterday. This may be true; but, as above stated, the absence of the oldest inhabitant prevented him from proving his case.

When I had walked across the length and breadth of Grimspound, and visited the spring just outside the wall—no doubt the scene of many a sanguinary fight, the besiegers trying to keep the besieged from getting at the water—and when I had drunk of the water, which looks so brown as it trickles through the little pools among the peat, I walked slowly up the hill of Hooknor and found my shady place beside the rocks, and sat down and filled my pipe, still agitated with the abominable mystery and enigma of the canvas bag: yet thinking I could devote my mind uninterruptedly to its consideration and to the tobacco. But it was a day of mysteries.

Before I tell you what followed, please to bear in mind that, though one talks of valleys and the tops of hills, the Tor of Hooknor is a very low elevation, and is certainly not the fourth part of a mile from Grimspound; next, that the enclosure lies on the upland slope of the opposite hill, though low down. Therefore, to one upon Hooknor it is spread out like a map—the map of an island, in which the outer wall represents the seacoast, and the stone circles, lakes or mountains, according to the fancy of the observer. Thirdly, that the air was so clear and bright, so free from vapour or haze, that every blade of grass and every twig of heather on the opposite hill seemed visible from where I sat; and, lastly, that I am gifted with very long sight, insomuch that when I take a book of small print I am fain, in order to get the full flavour of it, to set it up at one end of the room and to read it from the other. If you understand all this, you will perfectly understand what followed.

At the same time I was perfectly in the view of anyone in Grimspound, had there been anyone there.

There was no one within sight or hearing; there was neither sight nor sound of human life, looking from Hooknor at the great massive hill of Hamil Down; neither up nor down the valley, from this place, could be seen a village, a clearing, a farm, or any trace of man. Then I fell to thinking again about that bag. How on earth did it get into such a queer place? Such a thing no more got into such a place by accident than the wondrous order of the Cosmos is arrived at by accident; it could not have been dropped out of anybody's pocket by accident—the figuration and situation of the recess forbade that. It could not, again, have been deposited

very recently, considering the mouldiness of the bag. I thought of putting it back and watching. But in order to watch one must hide, and there is no place in Hamil Down for even a dwarf to hide. Besides, if it had been left there five or six years before, the hiding-place might now be forgotten. And, again, one would have to watch continuously, and the top of Hamil would be bleak in winter and cold at night; and there would be difficulties about grub.

While I was thinking, a figure, which I began dimly to perceive through the nebulous veil of thought, was working his way slowly down the hillside opposite by nearly the same way as I had myself picked among the boulders. He came plodding along with the heavy step and rolling shoulders of one who walks much over ploughed fields and heavy land—George Sidcote had acquired that walk since his narrowed circumstances made him a hind as well as a master. This man looked neither to right nor left. Therefore, he was not only a countryman, but one who knew the moor, and was indifferent, as rustics seem—but they are not in reality—to its beauty and its wildness. As he came lower, I observed that he walked with hanging head, as if oppressed with thought; and presently, though his face remained hidden, I recognised him. By his mop of red hair, by his great beard, by his rolling shoulders, this could be no other than David Leighan. What on earth was David wanting on Hamil Down, and whither was he going? It was our returned prodigal, and the suspicion occurred to me immediately that not only was the prodigal impenitent, but that he was 'up' to something. It might have been a suspicion as unjust and unkind as it was baseless, but it certainly crossed my mind. Where was he going, and why?

It thus became apparent that he was making for Grimspound. For if he had been going to Challacombe he would have kept higher up; and if he had been going to Vitifer or to Post Bridge, he would have kept on for a quarter of a mile before striking the path; but he made straight down the hill, just as I had done. Was David also among the archæologists? Was he going to verify on the spot a theory on their purpose and construction—first conceived, perhaps, among the blacks?

Whatever he was in search of, he had a purpose in his mind. His face, which I could now make out plainly under the shade of his felt hat, was set with a purpose. Your naturally slow man, when he has a definite purpose in his mind, shows it more intelligibly than the swift-minded man who jumps from one idea to another.

He was going to Grimspound—perhaps the purpose marked in his face was only a determination to sit down and take a pipe among the ruins. In that case he might take it kindly if I were to shout an invitation to join me. But no. When he should see me it would be time enough to shout.

In the corner of Grimspound, nearest to Hamil Down, there are lying, piled one above the other, three or four stones a good deal bigger than those which form the greater part of the wall. They lie in such a way—I presently ascertained the fact by investigation—that there is formed a little cave, dry, quite protected from rain, dark, and long, its back formed by the lower part of a round boulder, while one side, sloping floor, and sloping roof are formed by these flat boulders. David, I observed (though I knew nothing then about this little cave—I dare say there are many others like it in the inclosure), made straight for the spot without doubt or hesitation. He had, therefore, come all the way from Manaton to look for something in Grimspound. This was interesting, and I watched with some curiosity, though I ought, no doubt, to have sung out. It must be something he had brought home with him—something valuable. He was not, perhaps, so poor as he seemed to be. When one comes to think of it, a man must have some possessions; it is almost impossible to travel about for six years and to amass nothing: one must have luggage of some kind when one crosses the ocean all the way from Australia to England.

He stopped at this convenient hiding-place. Then he looked around him quickly, as if to assure himself that no one was present to observe him—I wonder he did not see me. Then he stooped down, reached within some cavity hidden to me, and drew out something.

It was in a big blue bag. I could plainly see that the blue bag, like my canvas bag, was weather-stained. He laid the bag upon a stone, and proceeded to draw out its contents, consisting of a single box. It was a box about two feet long and eighteen inches wide, and two or three inches deep. It was a tin box. What had David got in his box? I might have walked down the hill and asked him that question, but one was naturally somewhat ashamed to confess to looking on at what was intended for a profound secret. Let him take his box and carry it back to his cottage. I made up my mind on the spot, and nothing that followed in the least degree caused me to waver in that conviction—indeed, I heard very little of what had happened for some time afterwards—that the box had been brought home by David; and I was quite certain that it contained things which he had gathered during his travels. What

things? Well, they have coral, pearls, shells, feathers, all kinds of beautiful things in the islands of the Pacific. We shall soon find out what they were.

Good. David was not, then, quite a pauper. It is always pleasant to find that the returned exile has not done altogether so badly for himself. Let him keep his secret, and reveal it in his own good time.

David was so anxious to keep the secret that he actually took off his jacket—the sailor's blue jacket—wrapped it round the bag, and tied it up securely with string. Then, without looking about him any more, he turned and walked back as slowly and deliberately as he had come, carrying the treasure under his arm. As soon as his figure had surmounted the brow of the hill and had disappeared, I got up and sought the hiding-place in the wall of Grimspound. It really was a place into which nobody would think of looking for anything. The top stone sloped downwards over the mouth, so as almost to hide it. In this cluster of four great stones no one would have dreamed of finding or of looking for anything. David's hiding-place was well chosen.

Then I followed, walking slowly, so that I might not catch him up on his way home with his tin box full of queer things from the Southern Seas.

'The extraordinary coincidence, which I did not in the least suspect, was that on the very same morning that David went to recover the box I should light upon the bag. You will understand presently what a remarkable coincidence that was.

In the evening I told George all that had happened, and produced the brown canvas bag. George did exactly what is usual under such circumstances: without some conventional manner of receiving things, even surprises of the most startling kind, life would be too jumpy. He took the bag, looked at it, opened it, poured out the gold, counted it, held it in his hand and weighed it; looked at it again, put it back into the bag, and laid the bag on the table.

'It is weather-stained, old man,' he said, 'and smells of the mould. I should think it had been there some time.' He took it up again and turned it round. 'Look!' he said, 'here are initials; they are nearly faded, but they are certainly initials. I make out an A—no, a B; or is it a D?—and an L. Certainly an L; B. L. or D. L., which is it?'

'Looks to me,' I said, turning the bag about in the light—'looks like B. A.; but it may be D. L.'

'Will,' he cried, 'I believe you have really found something important. Six years ago, when Daniel Leighan fell off his pony, he always declared that he lost twenty pounds in gold. It was tied up, he always says, in a canvas bag. This must be his bag and these must be his initials. I am quite sure of it.'

'Very odd, if it is so. Why should a man steal a bag of money only to put it—money and all—into a hole and then go away and leave it?'

'Well, I take it that the thief put the bag there meaning to return for it, but forgot where he put it.'

'You *can't* forget the Grey Wether Stone, George. There is only one Grey Wether Stone on Hamil Down, and who in the world would go all up Hamil on purpose to hide a bag of money when there are hiding-places in every stone wall about the fields?'

'Take it to Daniel to-morrow and show it to him, Will. He always declares that he was robbed of this money as well as of his bonds and securities. Nobody has ever believed him, because it seems unreasonable that a robber should take twenty pounds and leave fifty. But if it is proved that he is right about the money, he may also be right about the bonds.'

Strange that neither of us thought of connecting David's box which he fished out at Grimspound with his uncle's bonds. But then I did not know that the bonds were in a box: one thinks of bonds as a roll of paper.

'As for David's box,' said George, 'I agree with you, Will, that it is best to say nothing about it. Let him keep his secret. If it is valuable, so much the better. We will keep the thing to ourselves. But as for the canvas bag, you must certainly take it to Gratnor to-morrow, and give Daniel the chance of claiming it.'

CHAPTER XI.

DAVID'S NEXT VISIT.

HAD I taken that canvas bag to Gratnor early in the morning instead of the evening, many things might have turned out differently; among other things, David's extraordinary scheme of revenge might never have been possible. If I had told Daniel Leighan the strange thing I had witnessed from Hooknor Tor, he must certainly have connected the box taken from Grimspound with the box of his own papers. As for me, however, I knew nothing till much later about that box of papers.

The scheme was almost worthy of David's American pals—the gentlemen who had all 'done something.' The box, when David had carried it home, proved to be quite full of papers. His own knowledge of papers and their va'ue was slight, but he knew very well that signed papers had been his own destruction, and that the possession of signed papers made his uncle rich. I do not suppose that he could have known anything at all about shares, warrants, bonds, coupons, and such things. But he did know, and understood clearly, that the loss of a box full of papers would certainly entail the greatest inconvenience, and might cause a grievous loss of property. The loss of ordinary papers, such as share certificates and the like, causes only temporary inconvenience, which may be set right by payment of a small fee. But there are some kinds of papers the loss of which simply means that of the whole investment represented. Among these, for instance, are coupons representing certain municipal bonds. They are made payable to bearer, and if they are lost cannot be replaced. In this tin box David found certain coupons of this kind. They represented an investment of nearly three thousand pounds. This is a large sum of money, even in the eyes of a rich man; think what it means to a man who has made his money by scraping and saving, by scheming how to best his neighbour, and by being as eager to save sixpence in a bargain as to force a sale for his own advantage! Three thousand pounds! It was the half of the money which Daniel Leighan held in trust for Mary until she should marry with his consent. He had almost brought himself to think that it was part of Mary's fortune which had been lost, and that he would be able to deduct that sum from the amount which he must pay her when he suffered her to get married. Three thousand pounds lost altogether! For now six years had passed away, and there was not a single clue or trace of those coupons, so that those who did not believe that Daniel had been robbed were inclined to think that the papers, wherever he had left them, must have been destroyed to spite their owner.

David called upon his uncle about eleven in the forenoon. He was received with the cordiality generally extended to all needy relations, and to those who think they have a right to expatiate upon their misfortunes and to ask for a temporary loan.

Mr. Leighan shuffled his papers as a sign that he was busy and wished the call to be short, nodded his head with scant courtesy, and asked his nephew what he came for.

'I've come, uncle,' David began very slowly, spreading himself

upon a chair like unto one who means to stay. In fact, he placed his hat upon another chair, drew out his pocket-handkerchief and laid it across his knees, and produced a small brown paper packet. 'I've come, uncle——'

'Don't be longer than you can help, David. Get to the subject at once, if you can. Say what you came to say, and then go away and leave me with my own business. It's high time you were looking after your own. Will George Sidcote give you a job?'

'Damn your jobs!' said his nephew, flaming.

'I hear you borrowed a bed yesterday, and a chair and a table, and that you have settled in the cottage—my cottage. Very good. I don't mind if you have it rent free till you get into work, when you'll have to pay your rent like your neighbours. If you begin any more nonsense about robbing you of your land, out you go at once.'

David, at the risk of seeming monotonous, uttered another and a similar prayer for the destruction of his uncle's cottage.

'If that is all you came to say, nephew, the sooner you go the better. And the sooner you clear out of my cottage and leave the parish—do you hear, sir?—leave the parish—the better, or I'll make the place too hot for you——'

'I didn't come to swear at you, uncle,' said David, more meekly. 'If you wouldn't keep on—there, I've done; now hold your tongue and listen. I've got something very serious to say—very serious, indeed; and it's about your business, too!'

'Then make haste about it.'

'Six years ago, they tell me, you were robbed, that night when you fell off your pony, after I'd gone away.'

'It was the evening of that very day.'

'Ah!'—David's eyes smiled, though his lips did not. 'We little thought when I used those words with which we parted, how quick they'd come true. When you lay there on the broad of your back, now, your face white and your eyes open, but never seeing so much as the moon in the sky, did you think of your nephew whose farm you'd robbed, and did you say "David, 'tis a Judgment"?'

'No, I didn't, David.' Afterwards Daniel wished that he had denied the truth of those details about the white face and the eyes which saw nothing; because, if a man is solemnly cursed by his nephew in the morning, and gets such a visitation in the evening, it does look like a Providence, regarded from any point of view. He did not, however, ask or suspect how David arrived at those details. 'I didn't say that, David. You may be quite sure I didn't say that.'

'You felt it all the more, then. Very well. While you lay there, as they tell me, someone comes along and robs you. What did you lose, uncle? Was it your watch and chain and all your money?'

'No; my watch and chain were not taken, and only a little of the money.'

'Uncle, are you sure you were robbed? Do you think that robbers ever leave money behind them? Was the money taken in notes, or was it in gold?'

'It was all in gold; fifty pounds in one bag, twenty pounds in the other, and both bags in one pocket. The small bag was taken, and the big bag left. But what does it matter to you?'

'You shall see presently. I am going to surprise you, uncle. What else did you lose besides the little bag?'

'I lost a box of papers—but what does it matter to you? Did you come here to inquire about my robbery? I suppose you are glad to hear of it.'

'Never mind, uncle. You go on answering my questions; I've got my reasons. I am going to surprise you. Wait a bit.'

'Well, then; but what can you know? It was a tin box secured by a lock and tied round with a leather strap; I carried it in a blue bag—a lawyer's bag—hanging round my neck for safety.'

'What was in that box, did you say?'

'David!' the old man changed colour, and became perfectly white, and clutched at the arms of his chair and pulled himself upright, moved out of himself by the mere thought. 'David! have you heard anything? have you found anything?'

'Wait a bit: all in good time. What was in that box, did you say, again?'

'Papers.'

'What kind of papers? Were they papers, for instance, that might make you lose money?'

'Money? David, there were papers in that box that could never be replaced. Money? I lost, with that box, papers to the tune of three thousand pounds—three thousand pounds, David—all in coupons!'

'It was a Judgment! Why, my mortgages were not so very much more. Three thousand pounds! Come, even you would feel that, wouldn't you? Were there actually three thousand pounds in that box?'

'The man who stole that box might have presented those coupons one by one, and got them paid as they fell due, without questions

asked—that is, he could until I stopped them. Oh! I could stop them, and I did; but I could never get them paid until I presented them through my own bankers. David, if you are revengeful, you may laugh; for it is a blow from which I have never recovered. They say that the paralysis in my legs was caused by falling from the pony, whereby I got, it seems, concussion of the brain. But I know better, David. A man like me does not get paralyzed in the legs by falling on his head. 'Twas the loss of all the money—the loss of three thousand pounds—that caused the paralysis. And now, I sit here all day long—I who used to ride about on my own land all day long!—and I try to think, all day and all night, if I could have left that box anywhere, or given to anyone that bag of twenty sovereigns. David, tell me—I will reward you if you tell me anything to my advantage—have you heard something?'

David nodded his head slowly.

'Three thousand pounds,' he repeated. 'It was three thousand pounds.'

'I'm not a rich man, David, though you think I am. As for taking your farm, if I hadn't taken it, somebody else would: for you were a ruined man, David—you were a ruined man. And now, even if I leave it to you in my will, for I must leave my property to someone—it is a hard thing that a man can't take his property with him when he dies!—it would be little use, because Mary's money must come out of it. Oh! it was a hard blow—a cruel, hard blow!'

'Yes,' said David. 'As a Judgment, it was a—a—a—wunner. I never heard of a nobler Judgment. Three thousand pounds!—and a fall off your pony!—and a paralysis!—all for robbing me of my land. Did you ever offer any reward?'

'No. What was the good?'

'Would you give any reward?'

'I would give—I would give—yes: I would give ten pounds to get that box back again.'

'Ten pounds for three thousand. That's a generous offer, isn't it!'

'I'd give fifty pounds—I'd give a hundred—two hundred—four hundred, David.' He multiplied his offer by two every time that David shook his head.

'You'd have to come down more handsome than four hundred to get back three thousand pounds. Well,' he rose as if to go, 'that's all I've got to say this morning. That will do for to-day. Much more handsome you would have to come down.'

'David!' cried his uncle eagerly, 'what do you mean by being more handsome. Tell me, David—do you know anything?'

'Why,' said David, 'I may know, or I may not know. What did I tell you? Didn't I say that I might have something to sell? Well—that's enough for this morning!' He moved towards the door.

'David, David, come back! What have you got to sell?'

'That is my secret.' He stood with his hand on the door-handle. 'If you tell a secret, what is the good of it?'

'David, stop—stop! Do you know where that box was taken? Oh! David, put away your hard thoughts. Remember you were ruined already. I didn't ruin you; my heart bled to see your father's son ruining himself.'

David made the same remark about his uncle's heart as he had made concerning his reference to jobs and his allusion to the cottage.

'Look here, uncle: perhaps the box exists, and perhaps it doesn't. Perhaps I have learned where it is, and perhaps I haven't. Perhaps I've got a paper out of the box in my pocket at this minute, and perhaps—well, what would you give me for a paper out of the box, taken out this very morning, none of the other papers having been so much as touched? Not one of the books full of those coupons, or whatever you call them, but a paper worth nothing. What would you give for that, just to show that the others can be laid hold of?'

'Oh! give it to me, David;' the old man stretched out both hands with yearning eyes; 'let me look at it. Can it be that the box is found after all, and safe?'

'If it is found, depend upon it that it is safe, uncle. Take your oath of that. The man who's got that box won't let it go in a hurry, particularly when he knows what's inside of it. Three thousand pounds! and, perhaps, if he knew it, his own, for the trouble of presenting them at the right place.'

'They've been stopped,' Daniel explained, for the second time. 'You don't know what that means, perhaps; it means that anyone who presents those papers for payment will find the money stopped, and himself taken up for unlawful possession of the coupons—unlawful possession, David—which is seven years, I believe!'

Perhaps he was not wise in giving this warning. For it stands to reason that the coupons might have been presented, and so the possessor been detected and the whole recovered.

'Very well,' said David, who had that valuable quality, often

found with the slow mind, of imperturbability. 'But you can't touch the money without the papers, can you? Not you. Very well, then. Without talking of those coupons, as you call them, for the present, what should you say supposing I was to show you now—this minute—one of the other papers that were in the box?'

'Do you mean it, David? do you mean it?'

'I mean business, uncle. I mean selling, not giving.'

'I suppose,' said Daniel, trying to preserve a calm exterior, but trembling down to the tips of his fingers, 'I suppose, David, that the man who has the box has communicated with you because he thinks you are my enemy?'

'You may suppose so, uncle, if you like.'

'And that he is willing to make a deal. He would give up the papers, which are of no use to him, in return for hard cash—eh, David?'

'You may suppose that, too, if you like.'

'Papers stolen from me—papers the unlawful possession of which would ensure him a long imprisonment?'

'Just as you like, uncle. Only—don't you see?—at the first mention of the word "imprisonment" all these papers would be dropped into the fire, and then—where are you? No more chance of recovering a penny!'

'Show me—prove to me—that you know something about the box.'

'I am going to prove it to you.' David left the door and came back to the table, standing over his uncle. 'What will you give me, I ask you again, for only one paper out of the box, just to prove that the other papers exist?'

'What paper is it?'

'You shall see; one of the papers that are worth nothing. I have actually got it in this pocket, and you shall have it if you give me ten pounds for it; not a penny less—ten pounds. If you refuse, and I have to take it back, ten pounds' worth of the coupons—now that I know their value—shall be torn up and burned. To-morrow I shall come back and make the same proposal, and the next day the same, and every day that you refuse you shall have ten pounds' worth of those coupons burned. When they are all gone you will be sorry.'

Daniel's lips moved, but no words followed. The audacity of the proposal, which really was almost equal to a certain famous proposal in 'The Count of Monte Christo,' though neither of them

had read that book, took his breath away ; but if David really had access to the box, he was undoubtedly the master of the situation. Mr. Leighan was the more astonished, because hitherto he had supposed his nephew to be a fool. Very few men are really fools, though their faculties may lie dormant. David, before his bankruptcy, was incapable of perceiving his own opportunity in anything ; David, since his wanderings, especially with those rovers of America, who had all 'done something,' had improved.

'How do I know ?' Mr. Leighan asked. 'How can I tell that when you have got the ten pounds I shall be any nearer my coupons ?'

'This way, uncle. Oh, I have found the way to convince even you. In a day or two I shall come with another paper out of the box—one of those which are of no use to anybody—and you shall buy that of me on the same terms. If you don't, I shall begin to burn the coupons. When we have got through all the worthless papers, we shall get to the coupons, and then I shall begin to sell them to you as fast as you like to buy them, uncle—that is to say, if we can agree upon the price. And I promise you that, before you have bought them back, you will be sorry that you ever foreclosed on Berry Down. It will be the dearest bit of land you ever got hold of. Uncle Daniel, I think that before I've done you will acknowledge that we are more than quits. I've seen a bit of the world since I saw you last, and I've learned a thing or two.'

Daniel groaned.

'Uncle, before you give me that ten pounds, tell me how the devil you were able to send your own ghost after me every night ?'

'What do you mean ?'

'I say, how did you haunt me every night ? Why did you command me to come home ! What did you do it for ?'

'What did I do it for ?'

'After all, I'm come, and what is the consequence ? Mischief to you, money to me ; that's what has come of it. Mischief to you, money to me.' The jingle pleased David so much that he kept on repeating it, 'Mischief to you, money to me.'

'Oh ! I don't know—I don't know what this man means,' the old man cried in distress. 'What *does* he mean with his haunting and his ghost and his orders ? Nephew, I am getting tired of this. Show me the paper, if you have it with you, and I will tell you what I will do. Put it into my hands.'

'Well, I don't mind doing that. If you tear it up, I shall want the ten pounds just the same. It doesn't matter to me if you tear

up all the papers. Now,' he unfolded the brown paper packet, 'what do you think of this?' He took out a paper somewhat discoloured by damp. 'What is this? "The last Will and Testament of Daniel Leighan."'

He placed it in his uncle's hands.

'This is a precious document, truly,' said Daniel, 'a valuable document. Why, man, I've made another will since.'

'I don't care how many wills you have made. I don't care whether it is valuable to you or not. To me it is ten pounds. Ten pounds, uncle. Tear it up or burn it, just as you like. But ten pounds.'

'If I give it to you, how do I know that you will give me back my coupons?'

'Why, you had better not even think of my giving you back your coupons. When did you ever give anything to anybody? Do you think I shall return your generosity by giving you anything? No, I shall sell you those coupons one by one. You shall see your thousands melt away every day, just as you are getting them back into your hands. You took my land away at a single blow. I shall take your money from you bit by bit, little by little, like pulling out your teeth one by one!'

'You are a devil, David. You were only a fool when you went away. You have come back a devil.'

'Who made me, then? You! Come, don't let us talk any more. There is your paper. Give me my ten pounds and I will go. To-morrow or next day, just as I please, I shall come back.'

Daniel Leighan's hands trembled, and he hesitated. But he did not doubt his nephew's words. He knew that the box had been somehow recovered, and that his papers were in David's reach, if not in his power.

He opened his desk, and took out of it one of those little round boxes which are made for bottles of marking-ink. A sovereign just fits into those boxes. He kept one in his desk filled with sovereigns. Mary went over to Moreton once a month to get the money for him. He held this box tightly in his left hand, and began very slowly to count out ten pounds.

'Here, David,' he said, with a heavy sigh; 'here is the money. Heaven knows it is hard enough in these times to make ten pounds, and harder to give them away. The Lord send you a better heart, David.'

'Thank you, uncle; the same to you, I'm sure. If we both had better hearts, uncle, what fools we should look—eh!'

'If you had read this will, David, you would have found yourself put down for something good. Well—so far I forgive you. But don't tempt me too much, or you may find my real last will and testament a very different thing. You are my nephew, David—my only nephew—and I've got a good deal to leave—a good deal to leave, David.'

'As for my inheritance, uncle, I am going to take it out of you bit by bit—a little to-day and a little to-morrow. I shall enjoy it better that way. I think that's all. Oh no! You may be thinking to charge me with unlawful possession of your property. If you do, the whole of the papers will go into the fire. Remember that! And now, uncle, I think I've done a good morning's work, and I'll go away and have some beer and a pipe. Take care not to talk about this little matter to anyone, or it will be the worse for you—mind, not to Mary or to George or anybody. If you breathe a word, all the papers go into the fire.'

CHAPTER XII.

THE SECOND DREAM.

When Mary came in about one o'clock to clear the table and lay the cloth for dinner, she found her uncle in a very surprising condition. He was in tears—actually in tears. He had been weeping. How long ago was it since Daniel Leighan had been seen to weep? The misfortunes of his neighbours passed over him, so to speak, and left him dry-eyed; as for himself, he had met with no misfortunes in his life except the loss of his box of papers and the paralysis of his lower limbs. This is a grievous thing to endure, but a man—an old man—does not weep because one of the afflictions of age falls upon him.

Yet Daniel's eyes were wet with tears, and his papers lay untouched upon the table, and he had turned his head unto his pillows, as Ahab turned his unto the wall.

'Why, uncle,' cried Mary, 'whatever is the matter?'

'I wish I was dead, Mary! I wish I was dead and buried, and that it was all over.'

'Why, uncle? Are you ill?'

'No; I would rather be ill. I could bear any pain, I think, better than this——'

'Then what is it? You are trembling. Will you take a glass of wine?'

'No—I can't afford it. I can't afford any luxury now, Mary. You will have to watch over every penny for the future.'

'What has happened, then?'

'I am a miserable man. I have been miserable for six years, thinking over my papers; but I always hoped to find them. And now——'

'Now, uncle?'

'Now they are found—that is all. They are found, and I had never really lost them till they were found.'

'Where were they, after all?'

'I cannot tell you, Mary. I only heard to-day—by post—by a letter—not by word of mouth—that they are found. And they are in the hands of a—of a villain; a villain, Mary, who will rob me of I know not what, before I get them back. Don't ask me any more, don't tell anyone what I have said; I must have told someone, or I should have died. Don't speak to me about it; I must think—I must think! Oh! never in all my life before did I have to think so hard.'

He could eat no dinner: this morning's business had taken away all desire for food. After dinner he refused his brandy-and-water, on the ground that he could no longer afford brandy-and-water. He also made pathetic allusions to the workhouse.

'Come, uncle,' said Mary, 'you will make yourself ill if you fret. You have said for six years that you had lost this money, and now you find that you really have lost it—*if* you have—and you cry over it as if it was a new thing! Nonsense about the workhouse; you are as rich as you were yesterday. Take your brandy-and-water. Here—I will mix it for you.'

He took it, with many groans and sighs.

'Mary,' he said, 'David has been here again. He says it is all a judgment.'

'All what, uncle?'

'All the trouble that has fallen upon me—the fall from the pony, the loss of the papers, the very paralysis: he says it is a judgment for my taking his land. Do you think that it is a judgment, Mary? Perhaps I was hard upon the boy; but one couldn't stand by and see a beautiful piece of property going to rack and ruin without stepping in to secure it. If I hadn't lent him the money on mortgage, another would; if I hadn't sold him up, another would—and it is all in the family; that's what David ought to think, and not to come here swearing and threatening. In the family still; and who knows whether I shan't leave it to him? I must leave it to

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someone, I suppose. If it is a judgment, Mary——' He paused for a word of comfort.

'Well, uncle,' she said, 'we are taught that we bring our sufferings upon ourselves; and to be sure if everybody was good, there would be a great deal less suffering in the world. Nobody can deny that.'

'But not such a lot of judgment, Mary. All this fuss because David had to sell his farm, and I bought it! I can't believe that. Why don't other people get judgments, then?'

'Patience, uncle. Think—whatever happens now about that money—that it was lost six years ago.'

'Ah! you keep on saying that. You don't understand what it is to have the thing you had despaired of recovering dangled before your eyes and then taken away again. What does a woman understand about property? David laughed. There's something come over David. He is just as slow as ever in his speech and in his ways. But he's grown clever. No one could have guessed that David could go on as he went on here this morning.'

'What has David to do with it, uncle?'

'With the property? Nothing, Mary, nothing,' he replied hastily. 'Don't think that he has anything to do with it.' He groaned heavily, remembering how much, how very much, David had to do with it.

'Can I do anything? Can George do anything?'

'George would like to see me wronged. It is an envious world, and when a man gets forward a bit——'

'Uncle! it is not true that George would like to see you wronged.'

'Then there is one thing he could do. It seems a big thing, but it is really a little thing. If George would do it, I would—I would—I would—no: because I should only lose the money another way.'

'You mean you would give your consent, uncle?'

'No—no; I can't do that. I couldn't yesterday; much less to-day, Mary.'

'Well, what is this thing that George could do for you?'

'A villain has got my property, Mary. George might go and take it from him. If I had the use of my limbs, I'd dog and watch that villain. I would find out where he had put the property. I would tear it out of his hands if I could get it no other way. Old as I am, I would tear it from his clutches.'

'George can hardly do that for you, uncle. Especially when you

refuse your consent to our marriage, and are going to drive him out of Sidcote, as you drove David out of Berry.'

Mr. Leighan shook his head impatiently.

'It's business, girl; it's business. How can I help it?'

'Well, then, uncle, if you are in real trouble, send for George and tell him, and let him advise you.'

'George—advise—*me?* Mary, my dear, when I begin to want advice of any man, send for the doctor and order my coffin. I might use George's arms and legs; but my own head is enough for me, thank you.'

He said no more, but took his pipe, and began to smoke it.

'There is another way,' he said. 'But I doubt whether you have sufficient affection for your uncle to try that way.'

'Is it something that I could do? Of course I will do it, if I can.'

'Will you? It's this, girl. Hush! don't tell anybody. It's this: David has got a secret that I want to find out. How he got hold of the secret I don't know, and so I can't tell you. Somebody has told him this secret. Now,' his voice sank to a whisper, 'David was always very fond of you, Mary; and he is that sort of man that a woman can do what she pleases with him. Pretend to let him make love to you—pretend that you are in love with him. Wheedle the secret out of him, and then tell me what it is.'

'And what would George say while I was playing this wicked part? Uncle, if you have such thoughts as that, you may expect another judgment.'

He groaned, and went on with his pipe. Then he took a second glass of brandy-and-water, because he was a good deal shaken and agitated. Then he finished his pipe in silence, laid it down, and dropped asleep.

But his slumber was uneasy, probably by reason of his agitation in the morning; his head rolled about, he moaned in his sleep, and his fingers fidgeted restlessly. At four o'clock he woke up with a start and a scream, glaring about him with terror-stricken eyes, just as he had done once before.

'Help!' he cried. 'Help! He will murder me. Oh! villain, I know you now! I will remember—I will remember!' Here the terror went suddenly out of his eyes, and he looked about him in bewilderment.

'Mary! I remembered once more. Oh! I saw so clear—so clear!—and now I have forgotten again. This is the second time that I have seen in my dream the man who took my papers and my

gold—the second time! Mary, if it comes again, I shall go mad. Oh! to be so near, and to have the villain in my grasp—and to let him go again! Mary, Mary—the loss of the money, and the dream, and your cousin David—all together—will drive me mad!'

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CANVAS BAG.

This was truly an auspicious evening for me to present myself with my newly-recovered bag. However, ignorant of the morning storm, I walked along, thinking how I would give the old man an agreeable surprise.

His room, when I called, about eight o'clock, was gloomy and dark, the windows closed, and the blinds half down, though outside the sun was only just setting. Mr. Leighan was sitting still and rigid, brooding, I suppose, over David's terrible threats. His sharp face was paler, and his steel-blue eyes were keener and brighter than usual. He was thinking how he should meet this danger, and how he could persuade, or bribe, or terrify David into submission and surrender of the papers. And there appeared no way.

'What do you want?' he cried sharply. 'What do you come here for? I am in no mood for idle prating!'

'I am come on your business, Mr. Leighan, if you call that idle prating.'

'My business? I don't remember that I ever had any business with you, Mr. Will Nethercote. I only have business with people who have money.'

'True, and I have none for you to get hold of; neither land nor money, that is very true. Yet I am come on your business.'

'Tell it, then—and leave me. Young man,' he said pitifully, 'I am old now, and I am in grievous trouble, and I cannot see my way out of it. Don't mind if I am a little impatient.'

'I won't mind, Mr. Leighan. Meantime, I have come to please you.'

'You can't. Nothing can please me now, unless you can make me young and strong, and able to throttle a villain: that would please me.'

'I cannot do that. Yet I am sure that I shall please you.'

'Go on, then. Go on.'

Then I began with the solemnity with which one leads up to a dramatic situation.

'Six years ago, Mr. Leighan, you said that you had been robbed of a bag with twenty pounds in it.'

'A bundle of papers and a bag with twenty sovereigns. I did. Good Heavens! one man comes in the morning about the papers, and another in the evening about the money. Go on—go on; I can bear it all.'

'There is nothing to bear, I assure you, Mr. Leighan,' I said, a little nettled. 'Come, it is all very well to be impatient, but there are bounds——'

'Go on; let me get it over.'

'Was that bag of yours a brown canvas bag with your initials—D. L.—on it?'

'I thought so,' he replied strangely. 'So you, too, are in the plot, are you? And you are come to tell me that I shall have the bag back without the money, are you? You in the plot? What have I ever done to you?'

'I have not the least idea what you mean. Who is in a plot? What plot?'

'George, I suppose, will appear next with another piece of the conspiracy. You are all in a tale.'

'I think I had better finish what I have to say as quickly as possible. You are in a strange mood to-night, Mr. Leighan, with your plots and conspiracies—a very strange mood! Is this your bag?'

I produced it, and gave it to him.

'Yes; it is the bag I lost. I never lost but one bag, so that this must be the one. As I said—the bag without the money. Well, I don't care. I have had greater misfortunes—much greater. You have come to tell me that the bag was put into your hands.'

'Not at all. I found the bag; I found it on the top of Hamil Down, hidden beside the Grey Wether Stone.'

'Very likely,' he tossed the bag aside. 'Why not there as well as any other place, when the money was once out of it?'

'But suppose the money was not taken out of it?'

He laughed incredulously.

'In short, Mr. Leighan, the money was not taken out of the bag. It was hidden away at the foot of the Grey Wether Stone, where I found it by the accident of poking my stick into the place where it lay. I heard the clink of the money, and I pulled it out; and here, Mr. Leighan, are your twenty sovereigns.'

I took them from my pocket, and laid them on the table in a little pile. His long, lean fingers closed over them, and he trans-

ferred them swiftly to his pocket without taking his eyes off my face, as if he feared that I might pounce upon the money.

'And what, young man, do you ask for your honesty in bringing me back my money?'

'Nothing.'

'You might have kept it. I should have been none the wiser. You are rich, I suppose, or you would have kept it. Many young men would have kept it. Can I offer you a pound—yes, a pound! —for your honesty?'

'No, thank you, Mr. Leighan. I do not want a reward for common honesty. Besides, you must thank George Sidcote, not me. It was George who discovered that it was your money.'

'As you please, as you please. In London you are so rich, I suppose, with your writing, that you can afford to throw away a pound well earned. As you please.'

'Nobody ever believed that you were robbed, Mr. Leighan,' I went on. 'But the finding of the money seems to show that you really were robbed while you were insensible. Perhaps we shall find the papers, too, some day.'

'Perhaps we shall,' he said. 'If they are in the hands of rogues and villains, I shall be much the better for it.'

'At any rate, it shows that you did not give the money to anybody.'

'Give the money! Will, you are a fool. Did you ever know me *give* money to anybody?'

'Certainly I never did.'

'Well, then, enough said about my robbery. It is strange, too; both on the same day——' I knew not, then, what he meant. 'Both on the same day—and after six long years. What can this mean?'

I can readily understand, now, and by the light of all that we have learned, my extreme dulness in having such a clue, and not being able to follow it up without hesitation. It was, of course, not the act of a common thief to steal a bag of gold and hide it away. And I had seen with my own eyes a man search for and find among the fallen stones of Grimspound a mysterious box, which he carried away stealthily. Yet I failed to connect David's box with Daniel's papers. To be sure, he had, so to speak, thrown me off the scent by speaking of his uncle's accident as having happened after his own departure. And I thought of the papers as in a bundle; not as in a box; and besides, I had formed a strong theory as to the contents of the box.

Yet, if there was one man in the place who owed Dan Leighan a grudge, it was his nephew. That should have been remembered. But again, that David should find his uncle lying senseless in the road, and should rob him and go on his way without attempting to give him the least help, was not to be thought of. It was incredible.

It is, I believe, a fact that novelists cannot invent any situation so wild and incredible but that real life will furnish one to rival and surpass it. In the same way there is nothing in baseness, in cruelty, in selfishness, in revenge, that can be called impossible. For this is exactly what David had done. The box which I saw him take from the fallen wall of Grimspound contained his uncle's bundle of papers; and the trouble that was hanging over this poor old man was the torture prepared for him, and already hanging over his head, of being slowly pillaged, and forced day by day to consent to new extortion.

'It seems as if the papers were stolen—now, doesn't it?' said Mr. Leighan. 'I suppose you all thought I was drunk, and put them somewhere, and then fell off the pony? Yes; I've known all along that you thought that. Well, I was not drunk; I was as sober that night as I am to-night. I used to wonder who the robber was. Now I don't care to inquire; it is enough for me that I have been robbed, and that I am going to be robbed again.'

'Why again, Mr. Leighan?'

'Never mind why. Will,' he said eagerly, 'tell me—I never did any harm to you: you've never had any land to mortgage—tell me, do you know nothing of the papers? When you found this bag, did you hear nothing about the papers?'

'I heard the wind singing in my ears, but it said nothing about any papers.'

'Are you sure that you know nothing?' He peered into my face, as if to read there some evidence of knowledge.

'I know nothing. How should I?'

'Well, it matters little; I am not concerned with the robber, but with the man who has them now. I must deal with him; and, there, you cannot help me, unless—no—no—I cannot ask it: you would not help me.'

'Anyhow, Mr. Leighan, you've got your twenty pounds back again. That is something. Confess that you are pleased.'

'Young man, if you torture a man all over with rheumatic pains, do you think he is pleased to find that they have left his little finger, while they are still like red-hot irons all over the rest of his body? That is my case.'

'I am sorry to hear it. At the same time, twenty pounds, as I said before, is something.'

'It's been lying idle for six years. Twenty pounds at compound interest—I don't spend my interest, I promise you—would now be six-and-twenty pounds. I've lost six pounds.'

I laughed. A man who knows not the value of interest laughs easily. I expect, therefore, to go on laughing all the days of my life.

'As for the papers, there's a dead loss of one hundred and fifty pounds a year. Think of that! All these years I've waited and hoped—yes, I've prayed—actually *prayed*—though there is no form of supplication which meets my case—that I might get my papers back again. Three thousand pounds there are, among these papers, besides the certificates and things that I could replace. Nearly all Mary's fortune lost.'

'No,' I said. 'Don't flatter yourself that you lost any of Mary's money. It was your own money. You are trustee for Mary's fortune, remember; and you will have to pay it over in full.'

He winced and groaned.

'Three thousand pounds! With the interest it would now be worth nearly four thousand pounds at five per cent. And now all as good as lost!'

'Well, Mr. Leighan, I am sorry for you, very sorry, particularly as you will have to find that fortune of Mary's very soon.'

'Shall I, Master Will Nethercote? I shall give Mary her fortune when I please; not at all, unless I please. Mary has got to be obedient and submissive to me, else she won't get anything. When I give my consent to her marriage, and not till then—not till *then*—I shall have to deliver up her fortune. Good-night to you, Will Nethercote.'

CHAPTER XIV.

DRINK ABOUT.

DURING these days David led the life of a solitary. He sometimes went to the inn, but only to get his bottle of whisky filled; he went to the village shop on the green to buy what he wanted, and he kept wholly to himself. Except for that daily visit to Gratnor, he talked with no one.

From time to time I met him leaning over field-gates, loitering along the lanes, or sitting idly under the shade of one of our high hedges. I supposed that his loafing and wandering life had made

work of any kind distasteful to him. But then he never had liked work. His face was not a pleasant one to gaze upon, and for a stranger would have been terrifying. It was now, as regards expression, such a face as one might have met on Hounslow Heath or Shepherd's Bush in the last century, with a fierce 'stand-and-deliver' look upon it—dogged, sullen, and discontented—the face of a man outside social law. He was sullen and discontented because he was always brooding over his wrongs; and dogged because he was pitilessly avenging them. At this time we knew from Mary that he went nearly every day to Gratnor, but we had no suspicion of what was said or done there. My own thoughts, indeed, were wholly occupied with the fortunes of George Sidcote, and I gave small heed to this sulky hermit. Yet, had one thought about it, remembering how the man came home in rags, and now went clad in the garb of a respectable farmer, and denied himself nothing, one might have suspected something at least of the trouble which was hanging over the poor old man.

'David,' I asked him, meeting him one day face to face so that he could not slip out of the way, 'why do you never come over to Sidcote? Have we offended you in any way?'

'No,' he replied slowly, as if he was thinking what he ought to reply. 'No; I don't know exactly that you have offended me.'

'Then why not come sometimes?'

'Why not?' he repeated.

'Come over this evening and tell us what you think about doing.'

'No. I don't think I can go over this evening.'

'Well, then, to-morrow evening.'

'No. I don't think I can go over to-morrow evening.'

'Choose your own time, but come before I go back to London.'

'When are you going back to London?'

'Next week.'

'George will be turned out of his place before the end of the year. The old man told me so. Then he'll go too. Mary says she'll go with George. Then I shall be left alone with Uncle Dan.' He laughed quietly. 'I think I shall go and live at Gratnor and take care of him. We shall have happy times together, when you are all gone and I am left alone with him.'

'Why, David, you wouldn't harm the poor old man now, would you?'

'Not harm him? not harm him? Did you ask him six years ago if he was going to harm me? Will he harm George Sidcote now?'

You cannot force a man to be sociable, nor can you force him to entertain thoughts of charity, forgiveness, and long-suffering. I made no more attempts to lead the man back to better ways and the old habits.

The place where David lodged was a cottage made up by partitioning off a portion of the old farmhouse of Berry; the other portion, intended for another cottage, was without a tenant. The place stands among the dismantled farm-buildings, for Berry farm is now worked with Gratnor. Around it was formerly the farmyard, but the ducks and poultry, the pigs and cows, the dogs, the farm implements, and all the litter, mess, and noise of a farm are gone now, and only the gates remain to show what formerly went on here. On the south side of the farmyard there is a rill of clear spring water running into a basin, and behind the rill rise the steep sides of Hayne Down. It is a quiet and secluded spot, with not a habitation of any kind within half a mile, and that only on one side. There are trees all around the place, and in the night a man living here alone would hear strange noises and, perhaps, bring himself to see strange sights. But David, who had got rid of one ghost, had not, I believe, yet invented another. If one were sentimental, David might be portrayed alone in the cottage, sad, amid the pale ghosts of the past; he might be depicted sitting among the shadows of his childhood, before he took to drink and evil courses, recalling the long-lost scenes of innocence, listening once more to the voice of his dead mother. All this might be easily set down, but it could not be true: David had had enough of ghosts, and was not going out of his way to look for any new ones. There is no doubt a luxury in conjuring up a ghost of anyone; but if you have had one with you against your will for six years, you are not likely to want another when that one is laid.

One evening, towards the end of August, we had been walking with Mary on the Ridge till sunset drove us home. Then we left her at Gratnor, and walked back to Sidcote; but as the night was cool and fine, we took the longer way which lies over Hayne Down and passes through Berry farmyard. Certainly we had no intention of prying into David's private habits, but they were forced upon our notice, and a very curious insight was afforded us of how he spent his evenings. It speaks volumes for a man when we find that his idea of a cheerful evening is a song and a glass with a festive company. I was once on board ship sitting in the smoking-saloon, when someone asked what we should all like for that evening. Some spoke untruthfully: some, affectedly; some, bash-

fully; some with an open-hearted candour which astonished. At last one man, a quiet person in the corner, said, 'For my part, gentlemen, give me an evening with a party of Norfolk drovers.' Ever since that occasion I have ardently desired to spend an evening in such company, but I have not succeeded. If David had been there he would have replied that he should choose a company where the drink was unlimited and the songs were convivial.

It was not much past eight, and twilight still. It had been a hot day, and the evening was still warm, though not oppressive. David, however, had put up the green shutter which by day hung down outside the window; and he had closed the door. But in a cottage shutter there is always a lozenge-shaped hole at the top, and through this we perceived that there was a light in the room.

'David is at home,' said George. 'Shall we call upon him?'

Then—it was the most surprising thing I ever heard—there was suddenly a burst of applause from the room. Hands and fists banged the table, glasses rang, heels were drummed upon the floor, and there was the bawling of loud voices, as it seemed.

'Good heavens!' said George; 'David has got a party.'

We stopped, naturally, to listen.

Then a song began.

It was a drinking song, roared out at the top of his voice by David himself. The song was one which I had never heard before, probably of American or Australian origin. As nearly as I can remember, the following were the words which we heard. But I may be wrong, and there were, perhaps, many more. The words are so sweet and tender, and have about them so much of delicacy and refinement, that I am sorry there are no more:

'Push the can about, boys,
Turn and turn about, boys,
Till the liquor 's out, boys,
Let the glasses clink.
Every man is bound, boys,
To sing his song around, boys,
Till we all are drowned, boys,
In the drink.
Till we all are drowned, boys,
In the drink.

'David is obliging the company,' I said. ''Tis a pleasing ditty, George.'

He sang, as I have said, as loudly as he possibly could bawl it, in a voice naturally ropy; and as his musical education had been neglected, and his ear was defective, the tune was the most dismal

and doleful I had ever heard. But no doubt he took it to be convivial and soul-inspiring.

When he had finished there was another banging of tables, holloaing, and stamping on the floor.

'Who can the company be?' asked George.

David began the song again, and repeated it half through. Then he left off suddenly and there was a dead silence.

We listened, waiting to hear more. There was a dead silence; not a sound.

'What is the matter with them all?'

'I believe they are all struck dumb,' said George.

The silence was complete.

'I have it,' said George. 'I believe he is giving a party to himself, in his own honour. He is alone, and is having a convivial evening. It is very queer; makes one feel uncanny, doesn't it?'

This, indeed, was actually the case. Fancy holding a convivial meeting—a friendly lead—a harmonic evening—a free-and-easy—a sing-song—all by yourself in a cottage half a mile from any other house, with the flowing bowl and glasses round, and three times three, and, no doubt, a deoch an dhorris to end with!

'I think, George,' I said, 'that David must have gone very low indeed. He could not have got much lower. There must be a depth at some point, where a sinking man meets with the solid rock.'

'Perhaps. The Lord keep us from beginning to sink. Will, do you think it possible, when that old man has taken my land, and I have gone wandering about the world, and have come home in rags, that I should ever sink like David—and drag Mary with me?'

'Nay, George; it is impossible.'

Then the roysterer began again, his voice being distinctly that of a man half drunk, from which we gathered that the interval of silence had been well employed:

'Every man is bound, boys,
To sing his song around, boys;'

and then we went on our way. It seemed shameful even to listen.

And all the time, every day, this man who got drunk at night alone was carrying on, slowly and ruthlessly, the most systematic revenge, with the most exquisite tortures. Every day he went to Gratnor and dangled before his victim some of his property, and made him buy it back bit by bit, haggling over the bargain; letting his uncle have it one day cheap, so as to raise his spirits;

and the next, at nearly its full value, so as to crush him again; and even at times, after an hour's bargain over a single coupon, he would put it in the fire and destroy it.

When David went away the poor old man would fall to weeping —this hard, dry old man, whom nothing ever moved before, would shed tears of impotent and bitter rage. But he refused to tell Mary what was troubling him.

'I can't tell you what it is,' he said. 'You don't know what the consequences might be if I told you. Oh! Mary, I am a miserable old man. I wish I was dead and buried and that it was all over—I wish it was all over!'

There are many men who, when anything goes wrong with them; when Retribution—a very horrid spectre—comes with a cat-o'-nine-tails to pay them out; or when Consequence—another very ruthless spirit—brings along disease, poverty, contempt, or other disaster, never fail to wish that they were dead and buried. It is a formula expressing considerable temporary vexation, but little more. For if the well-known skeleton were to take them at their word, and to invite them to take part with him in a certain festive procession and dance, they would make the greatest haste to excuse themselves, and to express their sincere regret at having given Madame La Mort the trouble of calling upon them. 'Another time, perhaps, if madame should be passing that way; but, indeed, there is no hurry; if madame will be so obliging as to—— *Good*-morning, madame. Again, a thousand pardons.' Mr. Leighan, perhaps, was more sincere than most men. For he loved but one thing in the world; and this was being slowly taken from him, bit by bit.

'It is something,' said Mary, 'to do with David. I will go and speak to him about it.'

'No, Mary; no,' he cried eagerly. 'Mind your own business, child. Don't attempt to interfere. Oh! you don't know what might happen if you interfered.'

'It *is* David, then. Very well, uncle; I shall not ask him what it is.'

'I can't tell anybody, Mary; I must bear it in patience. If I resist I shall only lose the more. Mary, we've got to be very careful in the housekeeping, now—very careful.'

'I am always careful, uncle.'

'There was a pudding again to-day. I can't afford any more puddings for a long while—not till Christmas. And I'm sure there's waste and riot in the kitchen.'

'Nonsense, uncle! You not to afford a pudding? Now, re-

member, you are not to be starved, and there's no waste or riot. Now I'll mix your brandy-and-water, and you can have your pipe, and go to sleep.'

CHAPTER XV.

WITH THE BEST INTENTIONS.

I TERMINATED my holiday with a meddling and a muddling. Of course, I was actuated by the best intentions. Every meddler and muddler is. Otherwise, he might be forgiven.

I was going back to town; it would be eleven months before I should get another holiday; long before that time Sidcote would be out of George's hands, and the pair would be married and gone. Was it possible to make an appeal to the old man? Could one touch him with the sense of gratitude? Could one make him feel that in his own interests he should not drive away the only living creature who stood between himself and the hired service of strangers. Could one make him see that it would be far better for him to give the money to Mary than to David?

I made my attempt—needless to say, since it was meddling and muddling, with no success—on my last evening at Challacombe, when the old man had taken his tea, and might reasonably be expected to be milder than during the press of business in the morning.

I had not seen him for three weeks. Remember, that for more than three weeks David had been pursuing his scheme of revenge. I was struck with the change that had come over him during this short period. It was that subtle change which we mean when we say that a man has 'aged.' In Mr. Leighan's case, his hand trembled, he looked feebler, and there was a loss of vitality in his eyes.

'What do you want?' he asked impatiently. 'You are come for Mary? Well, she isn't here. You ought to know that she always goes out after tea. You will find her somewhere about—on the Ridge or down the lane, somewhere.' He turned his head, and took up his pen again. I observed that he was poring over a paper of figures.

'No, Mr. Leighan; I came to see you.'

'What do you want with me? Money? No; you are one of the people who don't want money. The last time you came you brought me my bag, with the twenty pounds in it. That was very little good, considering; but it was something. You haven't got another bag of money, have you?'

'No; I have come to see you about George and Mary.'

'Go on, then. Say what you want to say. When a man is tied to his chair, he is at the mercy of everyone who comes to waste his time.'

This was encouraging. However, I spoke to him as eloquently as I could. I told him he ought to consider how Mary had been his housekeeper and his nurse for six long years, during which he had been helplessly confined to his chair. If he refused his consent to her marriage, she would go away, not only from his house, but from the parish; he would be left in the hands of strangers, who would waste and spoil his substance. I thought that would move him.

'Young men,' he said, 'I never asked for or expected any other service than what is paid for. Mary's services have been paid for. If she goes I shall find another person, who will be paid for her services.'

'Nay,' I replied, 'you cannot possibly rate Mary's services with those of a paid housekeeper. You will very soon find the difference. However, if that is your way of looking at the matter, I can say no more.'

Then I spoke of George, and of his mortgage. If Mr. Leighan gave his consent, no money would be lost, because Mary's fortune would pay off nearly the whole of the mortgage. And, besides, he would keep Mary near him, if not with him. A great deal more I said, which need not be set down.

'Young man,' he said, when I concluded, 'you are a writing person, and you speak as if you were writing for the newspaper which employs you. Business you know nothing of. But, young man, sentiment must not come in the way of business.'

I exclaimed that it was not sentiment, but common-sense, gratitude, and good feeling.

'As for common-sense, that belongs to business; as for gratitude, Mary has had her board and her bed, and she's done her work to earn her board and her bed—I don't see any call for gratitude there; as for good feeling, that's my business. Now, young man, George Sidcote's land is mortgaged. As he says he can no longer pay the interest, I have sent up the case to London and have got the usual order: he has six months in which to pay principal and interest. At the end of that time, because he can't and he won't pay, his land will be mine. As for what is done afterwards, I promise nothing.'

'You will lose Mary, for one thing.'

'I have told you that in that case I shall hire another person.'

'Very well. You will have to pay Mary's fortune to her cousin David; because she will marry without your consent.'

'Have the goodness, Mr. Will Nethercote, to leave me to my own affairs.'

'This affair is mine, as well as yours! Do you prefer David to Mary? You must choose between them, you know: I have read the will.'

'Oh! you think you have got me between the two, do you?'

'I do!'

'Then perhaps you are wrong. And now go away, and meddle no more.'

Now I declare that in saying what I did say next I spoke without the least knowledge. It was a random shot.

'You think,' I said, 'that David does not know of his aunt's will. You hope that he will go away presently without finding out.' He started and changed colour, and in his eyes I read the truth. He thought that David would never find out. 'So, Mr. Leighan,' I went on; 'that is in your mind. He lives alone, and speaks to no one; his aunt died after he went away: it is very possible that he does not know anything about it. Good heavens! Mr. Leighan, were you actually thinking to hide the thing from him and so to rob him? Yes; to rob Mary first and David afterwards, of all this money?'

'What business is it of yours?' he asked.

'Very good; *I shall tell* David!'

'Oh! if I were thirty instead of seventy, I would——' he began, his eyes flashing again with all their ancient fire.

'I shall go to David, Mr. Leighan. If, as I believe, he knows nothing about it, you will see how he will receive the news. Yes; you shall be between the two: you shall choose between David and Mary.'

Yes; I had stumbled on the exact truth, as accidentally as I had stumbled on the canvas bag. David did not know, nor had his uncle chosen to inform him—though he was certain from his talk that he did not know—of his aunt's will, deeply as it affected him. And I am now quite certain that the old man thought that David would not find out the truth before he went away again, and so he would keep the money to himself.

'Don't tell him, Will,' said the old man, changing his tone. 'Don't interfere between David and me; it is dangerous. You don't know what mischief you may be doing. Don't tell him. As

for George and Mary, I will arrange something. They shall go on at Sidcote as tenants on easy terms—on very easy terms. But don't tell David. He is a very dangerous man. Don't tell him.'

'I will not tell him anything if you will give Mary your consent.'

'David will not stay here long. When he has got—oh dear!—when he has got some more money he will go away. Don't tell him.'

'You have to give that money either to Mary or to David. Choose!' I repeated.

'Who are you, I should like to know,' he asked, with a feeble show of anger, 'that you should come and interfere in family matters? What business is it of yours? Go away to London. Manage your own affairs—if you've got any. You are not my nephew!'

'That is quite true. I am George's friend, however, and Mary's friend. I am going to do my best for both. Oh! Mr. Leighan, all your life long you have been scheming and plotting to get money and land. You think that you have laid your lines so as to turn George out of his land; and the prize looks very nearly in your grasp. But David has come back; that alters the aspect of affairs. You can no longer refuse your consent and hold that money in pretended trust for a man you believed to be dead. You must hand it over to him—the whole of it. I do not know whether he cannot force you to pay him back the interest upon it since it has been in your hands. You may be quite sure that he will extort from you the uttermost farthing. Well, you have the choice. Either give your consent to Mary, or prepare to treat with David. Why, you have said yourself, business before sentiment. Here is business, indeed, before you. Trust yourself to the affection of your niece and the friendship of George, the truest man in the world; or else give yourself over to the deadly hatred of a man who desires nothing so much as to revenge himself upon you. Why, he has avowed it. He will do you—he says it openly—all the mischief he can.'

'He is doing that already. And yet—don't tell him, Will—let us arrange something. George shall be my tenant. And when I die, I shall leave all my property to Mary—Foxworthy, Gratnor, Berry Down, and Sidcote. Think of that. She will be the richest woman in Challacombe.'

'No,' I replied. 'Choose between Mary and David.'

'I must have Sidcote,' he said, with a kind of moan. The poor

man had certainly aged very much in a few weeks. He clutched at the arms of his chair, his face twitched convulsively, and he spoke feebly. 'I have lost so much lately—I have suffered so horribly—you don't know how, young man, or you would pity me. I have been punished, perhaps, because I was too prosperous—you don't know how, and you can't guess. If I lose Sidcote, too, I shall die. You don't know, young gentleman—you don't know what it is to suffer as I have suffered!'

He looked so dejected and so miserable that I pitied him, grasping and avaricious as he had always been. The ransom of his coupons, day by day, had entered into his soul, though this I knew not at the time. And now I was going to take away the only consolation left to him—the prospect of getting Sidcote and of keeping Mary's fortune.

'I must have Sidcote,' he said.

'Then I shall go at once to David and tell him.'

'I must have Sidcote. Do your worst!' he cried, with some appearance of his old fire and energy. 'Do your worst. Tell David what you please, and leave me to deal with David. I will——' He shook his head and pointed to the door. Very well, I would go and tell David. As the event happened, I should, perhaps, have done better to have kept silence. But one could not tell beforehand what was going to happen.

In fact, I told David that very evening.

He was sitting at his table, a large open book before him, over which he was poring intently. The window was open, for it was a hot evening and not yet sunset. A bottle of spirits stood on the table, with a tumbler and a jug of cold water, ready for drinking-time, which I gathered would shortly begin.

He looked up when he heard my step outside, and shut the book hurriedly.

'What do you want here?' he asked roughly. 'Why do you come prying after me?'

'Don't be a fool, David,' I replied. 'If you come outside, I will tell you why I came.'

He hesitated a moment and then came out. Really, I think he looked more disreputable—that is to say, lower—than when he arrived in rags. A man may, perhaps, be in rags, and yet not be disreputable: he may wear them picturesquely, he may even wear them with dignity. Not that David was either picturesque or dignified on his arrival. Yet he looked better somehow than now, when he had been at home a month. Strong drink and plenty of it, the

satisfying of revenge and hatred, the want of work and exercise, had already written their evil marks upon his countenance, which was bloated and evil-looking.

'Upon my word, David,' I said, 'one would think we were old enemies instead of old friends.'

'Speak up, then,' he replied, his eyes suspicious and watchful, as if I was trying to get into his cottage and steal something. 'Speak up; let a man know your business. If you had no business you would not come here, I take it.'

'It is business that may concern you very deeply,' I said. And then I told him.

'Well,' he said, slowly, 'I suppose you mean honest, else why should you tell me? Perhaps you've got a score against the old man, too.'

'Not I, David. I am not his debtor!'

'He never told me. He might have told me a dozen times.' David sat on a boulder and began to turn the thing over. 'This wants thinking of, this does. So the old woman had six thousand, had she? She began with one, and Mary's mother had one—a thousand each; and my father had Berry Down, and Uncle Daniel he had Gratnor. She lived with him, and he told her what to do with her money; so in forty years she made six thousand of it; and Mary is to have it if she marries with her uncle's consent, and, if she doesn't, I'm to have it.'

'That is exactly the state of the case.'

'If Mary marries George without the old man's consent,' he repeated, 'he'll have to give me all that money—six thousand pounds.'

'Mary will marry George with or without her uncle's consent; I can tell you that beforehand. She will marry him within a very few weeks.'

'Nay,' he said; 'rather than give me the money he'd let her marry the blacksmith.'

'Well; I have told you.'

'Why,' he said, 'rather than give me the money he'd let her marry the Devil.'

At this point I came away, for fear he might try even to get beyond that possibility; and the mess I had almost made of the whole business proves, as I said before, that there is no excuse whatever for the best intentions.

CHAPTER XVI.

DAVID MAKES A PROPOSAL.

'QUICK, David, quick!' cried the old man eagerly. 'Let us get to work. Oh! you waste half the morning; let us get on. At this rate,' he sighed, 'we shall take months before I have got back the property.'

'There will be no trade this morning, uncle,' David replied, standing in the doorway. It was a week after I had told him the truth. He had been turning it over in his mind in the interval.

'Why not? David, if you were nearly seventy you would be anxious to get on; you would not shilly-shally over a single bit of paper. Let us get on, David. Oh! you've got all the power now, and I am in your hands. I won't grumble, David. No, take your own time, my boy; take your own time.'

The poor old man was strangely altered in four or five weeks, that he should thus humble himself before his nephew. But David had all the power so long as he had any of those coupons left.

'We go so slow, David; and I am so old.'

David sat down with great deliberation, and as if he meant to stay a long time. But he had not with him his book of coupons.

'Surely not too slow for you, uncle. Why, you are a patient man, if ever there was one. How many years did you wait, laying your lines to catch me and my land? No one can go too slow for you if he only keeps moving in the right direction. How many years have you laid low for George Sidcote? No—no; not too slow for you.'

'I'm an old man now, David. Let me have done with the business at once.'

'Not too slow for me,' David went on; 'why, I can wait ten years. It is such a treat, you see, for me to be selling you your own property, and to watch you buying it, that I could go on for ever. I really could.' I think that he spoke the truth here, for the man was implacable and pitiless, and enjoyed every day more and more the spectacle of his uncle lying at his feet begging for mercy. If any gleam of pity softened his soul, the sight of the fields which had once been his hardened it again.

'You little thought when I came home that I was going to give you so much trouble, did you, Uncle Daniel? You thought you

had the whip hand over me always, didn't you? But you see:—first the fall from your pony, then the loss of your papers, then the stroke, then my coming home and finding those papers—all part of the judgment!—and now there's more to follow.'

'What more? Oh! David; what more?' the helpless old man only groaned.

Think of it. Outside, the splendid sun of August lay over the hills and combes, the woods and fields: the place was the most rural spot in all England, the farthest removed from the haunts of men and the vices of cities: in the next room was the most innocent girl in the world: close by was the little hamlet of Watercourt, where the people might be rude, and, perhaps, unwashed, but were yet full of the simple virtues which linger among country folk. And here, in this room, in an atmosphere of age and weakness, the fire burning in midsummer, the windows closed, were an old man, paralyzed and near his end, yet plotting and planning for the money he could never use, and a young man playing upon him a scheme of revenge worthy of the good old days when a king thought nothing of pulling out a Jew's teeth one by one until he parted with his coin.

'To-day, uncle, I have come to talk about my aunt's will.'

'Then he told you? He said he would.'

'Will Nethercote told me: you did not. You thought that as soon as our little business was finished I should go away, and never come back any more. You thought you would keep the money, did you? Not so, uncle; not so!'

'He told you, did he? I wish I could be even with Will for that.'

'You can't, you know, because he has got no land; and so you can't lay any plots and plans for him.'

'I thought you would never find it out, David,' Mr. Leighan confessed, with somewhat surprising candour. 'I soon found that you knew nothing about it; and that you never go about and talk; and I was pretty certain that you would never find out. Well, now you know, what difference does it make? You are no nearer the money.'

'We shall see. My aunt might just as well have left it to me as to you. To be sure, I never thought she had half so much. She began with a thousand. She must have pinched and saved.'

'She was a wise and a thrifty woman, and she understood, with my help, how to place her money to the best advantage. She ought to have left it all to me, because I made it for her. She

always said she would. But there—you can never trust a woman in a matter of real importance. And, besides, she was two years younger than me, and thought to outlive me. Well—well!'

'She left it to Mary, on the condition of her marrying with your consent; and, if not, the money was to go to me. And if I was dead—and you pretended to think I was dead—the will said nothing. So you thought you could stick to the money. Uncle, you're a foxy one! You ought to be in the States, and thirty years younger. There you would find yourself at home, with plenty of opportunity. Well, I am wiser now than I was. And see now, uncle, I don't mean to go away until this question is settled. What are you going to do?'

'Why should I tell you?'

'Keep it to yourself, then. I will tell you what you thought you were going to do. I've worked it all out. First, if you let George and Mary get married before the law lets you take Sidcote, you will lose Sidcote.' He began, in his slow way, to tick off his points upon his fingers. 'That's the first thing. After you have got Sidcote, you will be still loth to let the money go, and you will keep Mary waiting on. You think that I shall soon go. Then you will keep the money as long as you live. But suppose they were to marry without your consent, all the money comes to me—comes to me. Very well, then; comes to me. That sticks, doesn't it? You can let them marry now—and you will lose Sidcote: you can let them marry after you have got Sidcote—and you will have to pay up: if you keep on refusing your consent, you can keep the money as long as you like—unless they marry without. Then, you've got to give it to me—to me, uncle. You've had a taste of me already.'

He waited a little. His uncle said nothing, but watched him from under his long, white eyebrows—not contemptuously, as on the first interview after his return, but with the respect due to the strength of the situation.

'Very well, then; you would rather give that money to Mary than to me. But you would like to get Sidcote; you hate the thought of giving it to me, you intended to keep it to yourself. Yet there is no way out of it if you want Sidcote. Perhaps you think you would give it to Mary, after you have got Sidcote. But suppose she marries before? then you would be obliged to give it all to me. See here'—he put the dilemma once more as if to make it quite clear to himself as well as to his uncle—'if you give your consent now, you lose Sidcote; if you give it after you have got

Sidcote, you will have to pay Mary all her fortune ; if they marry without your consent, you will have to pay me all the money. Perhaps Mary will go on all your life, waiting for consent ; perhaps I shall go away ; perhaps she will marry without your consent. Which would you like best ?'

'Go on, David ; perhaps you are going to propose something.'

'I have been thinking things over, uncle. You are getting old ; you may die any day : then Mary would be free. It is true that she might marry to-morrow, in which case I should be entitled to everything. But I don't think she would be such a fool. If I were Mary I should wait. You are seventy now, and you've lost the use of your legs. You can't last very long. I should wait if I was Mary. Yes ; it might be a year or two—it couldn't be longer.'

His uncle heard without any emotion this argument in favour of his approaching demise—country people use plainness of speech about such matters—but he felt himself very far from dying, as masterful men always do up to the very end.

'Well, David, supposing that what you say is common-sense, what next ? If Mary marries at once she is a fool, and then I have you to reckon with. There is a good bit outstanding on the old account, and I don't suppose there would be much coming to you when compound interest and all comes to be reckoned up.'

'As for your outstanding accounts, we shall see when the time comes. And as for compound interest, it will be for you to pay that on my aunt's six thousand pounds.'

'The interest went for the keep of Mary.'

'I haven't heard that there's a word about that in the will. You've had her services as housekeeper for five years, and you've pocketed the interest. Why, I take it that you made five per cent. That's three hundred a year. There will be a beautiful day of reckoning, uncle. The sale of your coupons is nothing to it.'

'You were going to make a proposal, David ?'

'Not a proposal—not exactly an offer. What do you say to this, uncle ? Mary won't be such a fool as to marry yet. If she doesn't, you've only got to keep on refusing your consent, and then she must either marry without or not marry at all——'

'David, it's a terrible misfortune that you are come back,' his uncle interrupted.

'It is—to you. Well ; she must either marry without your consent or not marry at all as long as you live. You will live a year or two longer. Then you will die, and she will have the whole of it. That is so, isn't it ?'

'Go on.'

'Buy me off, old man.'

'Always buy—always buy!'

'To be sure. You've got to buy your own property back, because I've come home. You've got to buy me out on the chance of the money coming to me. Please yourself. What do you say to buying me out at a thousand?'

'A thousand pounds?'

'Yes, Uncle Daniel: a thousand pounds. And a very moderate figure, too. Consider: if they were to get married, you'll make five thousand by the bargain, not to speak of interest. If they don't, you'll have the satisfaction of giving your nephew a thousand pounds back out of the property you've robbed him of.'

'A thousand pounds!'

'That is the figure, uncle. Is it a deal?'

'I'll think of it, David. A thousand pounds! I'll think it over.'

Said I not that persons with the best intentions can never be forgiven? Here were matters worse than ever: the old man's heart hardened the more; his cupidity awakened; and David with a deeper treachery in his mind to take revenge upon his uncle. And all my fault!

CHAPTER XVII.

A GLEAM OF LIGHT.

ONE has had to say so many hard things of the unfortunate David, and he appears in so singularly unattractive a light, that it is pleasant, before one parts with him altogether, to record one occasion on which he showed a gleam of a better self surviving the degradation of six years. In fact, David had not reached that lowest of all levels, that solid rock, that hard pan, which is, in fact, the Earthly Hell. Doubt not that it exists, though perhaps we look for it in vain among the rags and tatters of the direst poverty. It is not there that we shall find it. In this dismal stratum the men and women live wholly for themselves, and fight and grab, and waste and devour, intent only on getting all that there is to be had, each for himself, of roasted meats and strong drink, and the pleasures which are symbolized by these. It is a land of purity—of pure selfishness, that is—unmixed and unabashed. Perhaps David sojourned a while in that country during the mysterious period when he tramped, rambled, trampled, roamed, wandered,

and vagabondized somewhere across the great continent of North America. He came out of it, I think, when he left California, after a series of adventures which would have done credit to a free-booter or a filibuster: but concerning which we had glimpses all too short for the natural curiosity of man.

He came home with those six years of wandering upon his back; every year adding its contribution to the great bundle of debasement which he carried. Pilgrim Christian's burden, though it does not appear to have grown smaller between the time when he began to groan under it until the time when he cast it off, is not recorded to have grown bigger. David's, alas! grew bigger every day. Unhappily, too, he was as unconscious of his burden as if it had been a hump. He came home debased; he was below the level of the honest labourers once his servants; and he was possessed by the Evil Spirit of Hatred, which filled him always and all day long with thoughts of revenge, pitiless and cruel. And yet he had not fallen quite into the Earthly Hell. It was Mary who found this out. I suppose it was only to be expected, if anybody should discover a weak spot in a man's Whole Armour of Selfishness, that it should be such a girl.

She went to plead with him for her uncle. He was in the deserted farmyard of Berry, with its tumble-down buildings. He leaned against the gate, a pipe in his mouth, thinking always of the fields he had lost, and the way in which they had been taken from him. It is unwholesome for a man to sit in the place which had been his, and to be brooding day after day upon how he lost it. Boabdil had few days of joy left in him, I dare say, after he rode away from Granada; but his mild sorrow and the resignation of his latter years would have been turned to madness had he continued to live within the walls of the city, and marked, day by day, the insolence and triumph of his conquerors.

While David looked before him, thinking of the past, and carefully forgetting all his own share in his ruin, as was his wont, and fanning the fierce flames of resentment within him, as was also his wont, he became aware that his cousin Mary was coming up the lane. Of course, his first thought was to get out of the way; but as he thought slowly, and Mary walked quickly, there was no time to carry that idea into effect.

'Don't run away, David,' she said; 'I came to talk with you.'

'Well,' knocking the ashes out of his pipe, which was done; 'come through the gate then, Mary. Will you talk in the cottage, or will you talk here?'

'Let us stay outside—here, in the shade, David. Do you guess what I have come to say?'

'I might guess,' he replied slowly; 'on the other hand, again, I might not. Better say it, Mary.'

'It is this, cousin. When will you cease to worry your uncle?'

'Did he tell you that I worry him? Has he been complaining?'

'No. He even denies that you have any share in the new trouble that seems to have fallen upon him. But I know that it is caused by you. After every one of your morning visits he is miserable. Every day he grows more nervous and more irritable. He sheds tears when he is alone—I have seen him, David. I am quite sure that you are the cause of his trouble.'

'Well, Mary; perhaps you are right. I may be the cause of it. Perhaps I may be the cause of a good deal more trouble before I have done.'

'Oh, David! think—he is an old man; he is afflicted with paralysis; you are hastening his end. What good will it do to you if you worry him into his grave? Will that restore the past? Will that make you what you used to be?'

'Nay, that it will not do. But when I see him at my mercy, crying for pity, I think of the day when I came to ask him to lend me a poor fifty pounds, with which to try my luck in Canada, and he laughed me in the face.'

'Well, then, David, does it do you any good to remember that day?'

'Yes——' he added a great oath, meaning that it did him an extraordinary amount of good to remember that day.

'I cannot believe that. Let the past be dead, David, and live for the future.'

'You don't know what you are saying, Mary. What should you know about it? You are only a girl'—he spoke roughly and rudely, but not unkindly—'what do you know? Let the past be dead? Why, all the world is crying because the past won't die. I only wish the past would die.'

Here, it seems to me, David hit upon a profound truth: for very nearly all the world—not quite—it would be, unhappily, far better if the past would die.

'Resolve that it shall die, David; and live for better things.'

'If the past should die,' he said slowly, leaning one arm over the gate; 'if the past should die, Mary, I should forget that I was once a substantial man, who sat respected at the market ordinary, rode my own horse, and farmed my own land. I should forget

that I had to go away from my native place, and take ship with the lowest emigrants. I should forget—Mary,' he whispered, 'I can trust you—I have told no one else—I should forget that I had been in prison—yes, in prison——'

'David!' she shrank from him, but recovered and laid her hand softly upon his.

'Yes; in prison. And now I am no longer fit to sit and talk with George and you. But I am fit to talk with my uncle, because, bad as I am, he is worse.'

'But if he is, David—if he is—forgive him.'

'Never!' Again he swore a great oath, almost as great as that of the Norman King. 'I will never forgive him, or forget him. Such as I am, he made me. Mary, don't ask me to forgive him. He had no mercy upon me, and I will have none upon him.'

'When it is all over, David, and your uncle is dead, will it please you to think of your revenge?'

'Yes, it will; I shall always be pleased to think that I could pay back something—I don't care how much—of what he made me suffer. Look at me, Mary, and remember what I was. Do you think I cannot remember, too?'

'Oh, David! But to keep alive such a spirit of revenge!'

'Wait, Mary; he has got George in his grip now. Wait; if George goes away and wanders about like me, and takes to drink and bad companions, and comes back to you in rags, with the past that won't die—and a prison, maybe—would you ever forgive your uncle for sending him away?'

'God forbid that I should be so tempted!' said the girl, shuddering.

'You don't know what may happen; therefore, don't come to me about my uncle. Why, cousin, if you only knew what is in his mind about you this minute, you would say, "Stick to him, David; worry him like a terrier with a rat—squeeze the life out of him!" That is what you would say, Mary!'

'No! Whatever is in his mind, I could not say that; I believe that I could not even think it.'

'Why, you have been his housekeeper and his servant for five long years, without any wages——'

'No, I have kept my fowls,' said Mary.

'And you've looked after the old man as no other woman in the world would have done; you've borne with his bad temper and his miserly habits, and now his reward is to rob your lover of his land and to cheat you out of your fortune. Yet you want me to spare him!'

Great passions are commonly supposed to belong, exclusively, to great men. A Louis Quatorze is so great and grand that he consigns a Fouquet to a life-long prison, and condemns the Man with the Iron Mask to be doomed to oblivion utter. A Louis Onze, another great King, keeps an enemy long years in a cage in which he cannot stand upright. There are many noble and spirit-stirring stories of the implacable hatred and wrath of Kings and nobles, and some of the Gods of Olympus. But that a rough and common man, degraded by his own vices, fallen from his own respectable condition, should entertain such an implacable passion of revenge—that seems, indeed, remarkable.

'I will worry him,' said David, 'as long as I can. I will never spare him. I've got another—— But never mind. Oh! when you are gone, Mary, he shall have a life that he little dreams of now!'

'David! It is terrible! Can nothing move you?'

'Nothing, Mary; not even you. And, mind you, don't try to put yourself between him and me, because he won't stand it. It isn't me that won't stand it, because I don't greatly care who knows; but it's him. He likes me to come; he watches for me and waits for me, though he knows that when I am gone he will turn and wriggle in his chair, and cry and curse. Yet he wants me back. Say no more about it, Mary.'

It was indeed useless to try further persuasions. Mary was silent. Her cousin, worked up by his wrath, stood before her with purple cheeks and flaming eyes.

'I must go away soon,' she said. 'I cannot let George go out into the world without anyone. And then I must leave him—alone.'

'Yes; but he will have *me*,' said David grimly.

'Well, I have said what I came to say, David; and I have done no good. If you would only forget.'

'I cannot forget. Stay, Mary: one thing I must say. Remember afterwards that I said it in time. Then, perhaps, you'll think that if it hadn't been for him, I might have been a different man.'

'What is it, David?'

'It's this.' His face softened the moment he ceased to think upon his wrong. It was but the wreck of a face which had once been handsome and full of hope: but it was better and healthier to look upon than the face black with revenge. 'Will tells me that you are going to marry George without your uncle's consent?'

'Yes.'

'You know that he must then give me the whole of my aunt's money?'

'Yes.'

'Very well, Mary. I am fooling him. Never mind how. But you shall not be wronged. You shall have all your fortune. Marry George without any fear. Remember—you shall not be wronged. I am as bad as you like—but I will not rob you, Mary, I will not rob you!'

Said I not that David had not sunk to the lowest level of the Earthly Hell? For that one promise of his, that he would not wrong the girl, I forgive him all the rest.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY.

PERHAPS the chief advantage of being a journalist is that you are expected to write upon every conceivable subject, and must, consequently, whether you are a person of curiosity and ardent in research or not, be continually acquiring new knowledge, and always storing up freshly-acquired facts. No one, therefore, is so wise as an aged journalist—the older the wiser; until there comes a time when his memory begins to fail. After that, he can sit at the dinner-table and talk as ignorantly as his neighbours.

As for me, I am every day hunting up something or other to illustrate and explain the startling telegram which never fails to arrive once a day. I have travelled—in a library—with this object over the whole face of the habitable globe. I think I know every island in the Pacific and every other ocean, its discovery, its early and its later history. The whole course of human history is at my fingers' ends, because I know exactly what volumes, on what shelves, contain what I want. The whole circle of the sciences is known to me—that is to say, I know where to look for a popular account of each, and where to find illustrations and anecdotes. The social life of every country is familiar to me, from the Court to the cottage, because I know where the books about it can be found: in fact, I am the Admirable Crichton of the day.

I would not proclaim my own virtues so loudly were it not that, first, we do not get the credit due to us—the novelists, poets, and dramatists running off with all the glory; and, secondly, that it was entirely due to my professional versatility that the Reign of Terror which King David had established at Gratnor was swept

aside, and King David himself dethroned ; and this, too, in a most surprising and unexpected manner. One would not, at first sight, be inclined to connect the fortunes of Mary Nethercote with the Royal Geographical Society. Yet—but you shall hear.

It was heard in the office of the paper which has been fortunate enough to secure my services that there was to be held a special meeting, on an evening early in October, of the Royal Geographical Society, in order to hear a paper read by a German traveller recently arrived in Europe after a lengthened stay in the South Sea Islands. Reader! you have perused the first two chapters of this history, and with your unerring sagacity you divine the rest. Nevertheless, I will tell it in order; though more briefly than if you had not already partly anticipated the reading of that paper.

I was instructed to write a leading article upon this paper. The inexperienced person would have procured a ticket, attended the meeting, made notes, and rushed away at ten o'clock in order to write his article before midnight. For myself, I employed means, which it is not necessary to describe—though, perhaps, they were immoral—in order to procure a private view of that paper before it was read in public. Consequently, with the help of a certain work of which I knew, and the presence of the map to keep one from going geographically or longitudinally wrong, I produced a leading article which gratified my chief and pleased the public. The paper read before the Society was on the people, the resources, and the natural history of that interesting island called New Ireland, of which I had never heard before. I took the precaution, after writing it, of attending the meeting; not that I wanted to hear the paper and the discussion, because I hate papers and discussions; but because I wished to be certain that the meeting really came off, and to be able to add any *little* detail as to the proceedings. A dreadful thing once happened to an unhappy critic who described a concert *from the programme alone*, without going to hear it. Most unhappily he permitted himself to make certain strictures upon the performers. I say most unhappily because—a thing he could never have foreseen—that concert was at the last moment unavoidably postponed, an accident which led to his connection with the paper being severed. Therefore, I repaired to the theatre of the London University and took a back seat high up in order to witness the proceedings. I do not remember to have heard it observed by anyone, but it is a remarkable fact, that, if you sit high up and look down upon the heads of the attendant Fellows of the Geographical Society beneath, you become presently aware that they have all

gone bald at the top—not, I believe, so much from age, as from a geographical sympathy with the North Pole.

At the hour of eight, the chairman entered with his captive traveller. The latter, certainly one of the tallest and finest men I have ever beheld, took his place in front of his maps, and began, after the usual introduction, to read his paper.

Of course I knew it all beforehand, and could look like the governess who takes the girls to a lecture on astronomy—as if that and all other sciences were equally familiar to me: yet it was more interesting spoken by this tall German—his name was Baron Sergius Von Holsten—than read from the proofs. He spoke very good English, and as he went on added many new details to those he had originally set down. He had lived, it seemed, for many years among the natives of New Ireland, although they are cannibals and of great ferocity. In order to qualify for this dangerous enterprise he had first learned their language. Then he had himself conveyed to the shores, won the confidence of the people by some skill or secret knowledge, and stayed until he had acquired all the information upon them and upon their island that could be obtained. And he had the good luck to be taken off at last in safety by a ship that touched upon these inhospitable shores.

After this paper was read, the usual irrepressible persons got up and began to discuss. At this point I retired to add a few things to my article and hand it in. I then repaired to the Savage Club, which, at eleven o'clock, begins to be a cheerful place. Here I found, in fact, an animated circle, and among them, my friend of the R. G. S., the Baron Sergius Von Holsten, who had been brought by one of the members.

It is always interesting to meet with men who have been on desert islands, or lived among cannibals, or travelled in those regions—now so few—where Messrs. Cook and Sons have no agents and there are no hotels. It is enough for some people only to gaze upon such a man. For our part, at the Savage, we found the Baron not only an interesting person and as well informed as a leader-writer, but also a singularly amusing companion, and brimful of anecdotes and stories of all kinds, which he seemed delighted to produce for our benefit. He took his tobacco very kindly, and had a quite pathetic affection—seeing how long he must have been deprived of it—for whisky and apollinaris. Perhaps, however, he wished to emphasise the *entente cordiale* between Great Britain and Germany by blending the two most important drinks produced in the two countries.

We talked till late. At about three in the morning, when we had gone half-round the world with him, and the waiter had brought the Baron his twelfth tumbler—a man so big had surely the right to fill up three times to any other man's once—he told us a very singular and surprising story.

He had not been the only European on the island all the time, he said. For six months or so he had a companion in the shape of a poor devil—an Englishman—who had been washed ashore upon a piece of timber, the only one, so far as he knew, who survived the wreck of the ship. The natives were going to spear this human jetsam, when he interfered, and saved him, and continued to protect him until he was able to get him off the island in a vessel which came a-blackbirding.

'This fellow,' said the Baron, 'was the most intolerable creature in existence. Earlier in his existence he had committed a murder, and during the whole of his stay on the island he was suffering agonies of remorse; all day long he wept and groaned, and was afraid to leave me for fear of being speared—in fact, the young men took a pleasure in pretending to point their spears at him, observing the intensity of his terror. At night, he would not sleep at a distance of more than a foot or so from me for fear. And he was always visited every night by the ghost of the respectable uncle whom he had slain.'

'Did you see the ghost?'

'No. Nor did I hear its voice. Yet it spent the best part of the night in abusing the poor man, and he in answering it with prayers and protestations. As for revenge, I suppose no other murdered man ever took so much out of his murderer. Well, it was tedious. At length my Englishman declared that he desired nothing so much as to get away from the island, and give himself up to justice. If he could only make his way to Australia and then get a passage to England, he would give himself up and confess the whole truth.'

'A lively companion!'

'Yes. But to look at him you would think him a dull, heavy fellow, who seemed to have no spirit for such a desperate deed. Well, I got him away at length, and was left happy at last and alone. Before he went, however, I wrote down at his request a statement of the murder—a confession, in fact—which he and I witnessed. I warned him that I should make any use of it that I thought fit. As yet I have done nothing with it; and as I dare say he is dead by this time, I do not see why I should

not tear it up. Here it is, however, written in my old note-book.'

He took it out of his pocket—a thick leather note-book, stuffed full of the notes which he had made during his residence in the place—and began to read: 'I, David Leighan, farmer, of the parish of Challacombe-by-the-Moor——'

'Hallo!' I cried, 'I know that man. There is only one David Leighan, and only one Challacombe.'

'Has he kept his promise and come home?'

'Yes; he came home three months ago.'

'So. He is doubtless hanged by this time?'

'Why should he be hanged?'

'For the murder which he confessed in this document. He was to give himself up to the police, and confess, and take the consequences.'

'But he has not murdered anyone; at least, he has not confessed.'

'He murdered his uncle, one Daniel Leighan, of the same parish. If he has not confessed, I must put these papers in the hands of justice.'

'Why, his uncle is alive still! What could he mean by confessing?'

'Then David must have been mad. In which case it seems a pity that I took so much trouble to save him from the stewpans. But here is his confession, and, if it is a work of fiction, all I can say is that David is a master of that art.'

'May I read the confession?'

He handed me the note-book, and I read it through. You, gentle reader, have already had that advantage.

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When I had read the paper through I understood everything. I understood why he came to the churchyard in order to see the grave of his victim; why he was so careless about his rags; why he was seized with that queer hysterical fit; why he was so moody and sullen; what it was that he took out of the hiding-place at Grimspound; what he was doing with the old man. Everything became clear; and one thing clearer than any other—that his uncle must be saved from him.

'Herr Baron,' I said, 'I must take you, if you please, all the way from London to Challacombe-by-the-Moor. You must stand before David with this document in your hand, and prove that he is a murderer in intent and a robber in fact.'

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LAST APPEAL.

WHEN the harvest was over—it is later up among the hills than in the lowlands below—and the grain was ingathered, and the work of the year completed, George began to make his arrangements. He had received the formal notice and a six-months' grace in which to find the money. There was no longer any doubt possible that he must leave Sidcote. He had now made it all out in his own mind. There would be enough money from the harvest to pay the half year's interest; the land would be foreclosed. And the sale of his stock, farm implements, furniture, and everything would leave him with a few hundreds to begin the world again. He would go to Tasmania; it seemed, from the books he read, the kind of country where a man might buy a small farm, and live upon the fruit of his own labour.

'Let us,' said Mary, 'make one last appeal to my uncle. We will go together, George. Perhaps he may relent even at the last.'

They made that appeal at an unfortunate time. To begin with, it was in the morning, when David was still with his uncle; and, in the second place, it was a morning when David had been abusing his position. The redemption value of the coupon, in fact, was at a preposterous figure, and the poor old man, torn by the desire to get back his property, and by rage at the terrible ransom imposed upon it, was rapidly arriving at the condition in which his nephew loved to see him, when he lost his self-command, and in turns grovelled, wept, protested, implored, cursed, and tried to bribe his nephew. It is well to draw a veil over this picture of sordid and ignoble revenge; of old age dragged in the dust of self-abasement; of baffled avarice and of ruthless malice. There had been a battle royal, and David, as usual, was the victor. No mere physical suffering would have caused Daniel Leighan more cruel torture than this daily bargain over his own property; no mediæval poet could have invented a more crafty and complete revenge. And outside, Arcady, with its hanging woods glorious in the autumn sun, its streams hurrying downward under the trailing branches, with their red and yellow leaves of the bramble, and the scarlet berries of the mountain-ash, and the calm silent mountains of Hey Tor and Blackdown across the combe; the peaceful farmyard, with the familiar sounds of contented creatures enjoying life; the dog sleep-

ing before the kennel and the cat sleeping in the sun-warmed porch, and the water of the leet musically dropping, dropping for ever, over the great wheel. In sweet Arcady man's evil passions should be stilled, otherwise the joy and gladness of Arcady are banished, and it ceases to be that sweet and happy land.

When they opened the door they found the old man trembling and shaking with the passions of impotence and rage. His face, livid and distorted, with haggard eyes, was turned upwards in an agony of entreaty, to meet David's. There was no passion in that face, nor any emotion except a calm and sober satisfaction, which might even have been holy gratitude, for David's heavy face was hard to read. He stood over his uncle's chair, dominating him, with a bundle of papers in his hand, regardless alike of prayers or imprecations.

'Wait a minute, George,' he said. 'We have just finished our business, and a most pleasant half hour we have spent, to be sure. Now, uncle—it is always pleasant, as everybody knows, to do business with my uncle—steady, I say, or you will have a fit—now, is it a deal, or shall I put this little packet into the fire? Quick! take it or leave it. That's my figure!'

'I'll take it—oh! I'll take it!'

David laid the papers on the table instantly, and made a note in a pocket-book.

'Pity,' he said, 'that you would not come to terms sooner. You'd have spared yourself a great deal of trouble and time. But there, you always would have your way, and you enjoy beating a man down, don't you?' His uncle did not look exactly as if he had enjoyed this last attempt. 'Now I've done, George.'

Although he had finished his business, David did not retire, but took a seat—Mary's seat—in the window, prepared to listen, and with the appearance of one interested in what was coming.

'What do you want, George?' Mr. Leighan asked, impatiently. 'Why do you come here while I am busy, Mary? I'm not so strong as I was, and David made me angry. Wait a moment. David said something that angered me. Wait a moment. He doesn't mean to anger me—no—no—but he does, sometimes.'

He covered his face with his hands. Presently the trembling left him, and he recovered.

'Now,' he said, with a show of briskness, 'I am better again. What is it, George? If it is business, have you come to propose anything? You have got your legal notice, I believe? Yes. Then you know the conditions of the law which I didn't make. It is

the same for me as for you. Pay me any other way, and keep your land. If no other way, I shall have your land. Is that sense, or is it not?'

'Hard common-sense,' said George.

'So it is,' said David. 'It's always hard common-sense when he takes another man's land.'

'Well, uncle, I have got nothing to say on that score.'

'I am sorry for you, George,' the old man went on; yet his face expressed a certain satisfaction. 'Nobody will blame you, I'm sure; or me either, for that matter; and when your poor father borrowed the money the land was worth three times as much as it is now, so that nobody will blame him. Take a glass of brandy-and-water, George. I don't expect ever to get the value of my money back. So we're all losers by the hard times.'

'He never offered me any brandy-and-water,' said David. But no one took any notice of the remark, which showed jealousy.

'I shall want a tenant, George,' the old man went on, 'and we will not quarrel about the rent. Easy terms you shall have—oh! I shall not be hard with your father's son—and when you've got your head well above water again, we will consider about you and Mary. Don't think I shall be hard upon you.'

'No,' said George; 'I am going to emigrate.'

'To foreign lands, George? to foreign lands? Has it come to that? Dear—dear!' Mr. Leighan belonged to the generation which regarded emigration as the worst and last of evils.

'I am going to Tasmania.'

'Tut, tut; this is very bad. To foreign lands! David went to foreign lands, and see how he came home. George, you had better stay at Sidcote and be my tenant.'

'No,' said George shortly. 'Well; the long and the short of it is, that we are here to-day—Mary and I—to ask your consent to our marriage.'

'No, George; I shall not consent. What! let Mary marry a man who has lost his own land and is going to foreign lands? Certainly not! not on any account!'

'When your sister left Mary all her fortune——'

'It was mine by rights. I made it for her.'

'She put in the clause about your consent to protect her. You know, as well as I, that she herself would never object to me for Mary's husband.'

'She began with a thousand pounds. By my advice she made it into six thousand pounds. Do you mean to tell me that I am to have no voice in the disposal of all this money?

'This kind of talk will not help anybody. Well, I have had my answer, I suppose. Mary, dear, it is for you to choose between your uncle and me.'

'I have chosen, George, you know well. Uncle, you will have to give that money to David or to me. Here is David, and here am I. To which of us will you give it?'

'Suppose, Mary,' David interposed, 'suppose there was a secret arrangement—I don't say there is, but suppose there was—between your uncle and me. Suppose that I was to sell my chance for so much down, and he was to keep the rest.'

'Uncle! you would not—you could not—do such a thing!' Mary cried.

'Suppose, I say'—David went on—'that arrangement was to exist. Then, you see, George and Mary'—David put the thing in his slow and deliberate manner, so as to bring out the full meaning of the transaction—'you see that if you don't marry without his consent, he will lose the money he's got to pay me; but if he does not pay me that money before you get married, he will have to pay me the whole afterwards. Therefore, he naturally wants you to marry without his consent. You are going to play his game for him.'

At this unexpected blow, Daniel was covered with confusion. When two people make such a treaty, secrecy is the very essence of it; and for one of the parties concerned to blurt out the truth is, in a sense, a breach of contract. The old man actually turned red—at seventy he had still the grace to blush at being found out in a shameful job—and hung his head, but he could not speak.

'Oh! you have speculated on our marrying without your consent! You have actually bought David's chance, and now you want us to marry, so that you may keep the whole to yourself!'

'Not the whole,' said David. 'What will be left after he has bought me out.'

'Mary,' her uncle replied, evading the question, which was not right. 'Mary'—his voice was feeble and he trembled—'why do you want to get married yet? Stay with me. Let George stay at Sidcote and be my tenant. And I will consider—I will consider. Besides, think, Mary: I am an old man now, and you will have all my money and all my land when I die.'

'Have you bought up David so that you may keep the money as long as you please, by always refusing your consent? Answer that,' said George hotly.

'I shall answer nothing,' Daniel replied angrily—'nothing—nothing! You have come here and asked for my consent to your marriage. Very well; I refuse it. Now, you can go.'

'Mary,' said George, 'it is no longer possible to leave you in this house. Your uncle has deliberately set himself to rob you. Come with me, dear; my mother will take care of you till we are married.' Mary hesitated. 'Go, Mary, put on your hat, and come with me. As for you, Daniel Leighan,' he waited till Mary had left the room, 'we leave you alone. Nothing worse can happen to you. When you have no longer Mary to provide, beforehand, all your wants—when you are alone all the day and all the evening, you will remember what you have thrown away. Oh! you are seventy years of age, and you are rich already, and you rob your sister's daughter in order, for a year or two, to call yourself richer still!'

The old man crouched among his pillows and made no answer. Mary was leaving him. But if she stayed he must give his consent, and then he would lose that land. So he made no answer.

Ten minutes later, Mary returned, carrying a small bag in her hand.

'I have come to say good-bye, uncle.' Her eyes were full of tears. 'I knew that I must choose between George and you. I knew that you would refuse because George could save his land if he had my money, and I knew that your heart was set upon getting his land. But I did not know—oh! I could not guess—that you had planned this wicked thing to get my fortune as well as George's land. Everything that I have is yours; but I suppose you will let me have my clothes as wages for six years' work? Come, George.'

'You will go—and leave me—all alone, Mary?'

'*I* am here still, uncle,' said David. 'I will come and stay here—I will be with you all day long, and every evening. Not alone; you still have me. We shall have a roaring time now that Mary is gone. We will bargain all day long.'

The old man looked up, and saw his enemy before him with exulting eyes, and the room empty, save for those two, and he shrieked aloud with terror. David with him always!

'Mary!' he cried, while yet her soft footsteps, gone for ever, echoed still about the quiet house. 'Mary!' But it was too late. 'Come back, Mary! Don't leave me—don't leave me—and you shall marry whom you please! Mary! Mary! I give you my consent! Mary, come back!'

She was gone ; and there was no answer. Then he turned his face into the pillows and moaned and wept. Even David had not the heart to mock him in this first moment of his self-reproach and dark foreboding of terror and trouble to come.

CHAPTER XX.

THE THIRD DREAM

THE wedding bells rang out as merrily for Mary as if she was giving her hand to an Earl instead of a ruined farmer : as joyfully as if the whole of her life was planned for ease and laziness, instead of hard work : as happily as if Fortune had poured into her lap all that the earth can give or the heart can desire. The bells rang out over the whole great parish, from Foxworthy to Hey Tor—from Riddy Rock to Hamil Down. They were echoed along the black precipice of Lustleigh Cleeve, and were lost in the woods of Latchell. They could be heard among the gray stones of Grimspound, and on the open barrow of King Tor. They drowned the roaring of Becky Fall, though the stream was full. They rolled like mimic thunder from side to side of Becky Combe. They beat into the ears of the lonely old man who sat in his parlour at Gratnor, his papers before him, trying to persuade himself that he was happy at last, for he had what the Psalmist prayed for—who can have more?—his heart's desire. He had longed ardently for the lands of Sidcote : he had longed in vain, until a fall in land made that become possible which before was impossible. He had that land now within his grasp : the place, in a few weeks or months, would be his ; and not only that, but five-sixths of Mary's fortune as well. He ought to have been a happy man.

Naturally, he was by this time deaf to the voice of Conscience, which had now been silent for many years. But when Conscience ceases to upbraid, she stabs, wounds, flogs, and chastises with any weapon which comes handy. And, to-day, she turned the ringing of the wedding bells into a flail, with which she belaboured the soul of Daniel Leighan, so that he could find no rest or peace while they lasted, or after. He had robbed the girl who had served him faithfully and affectionately—his sister's child—of her portion. He had taken her husband's lands ; he was driving her away to a far country, and he would be left alone. He had the desire of his heart, but he would be left alone. This was almost as much as if Alexander Selkirk had been informed by pigeon-post that he was

raised to the peerage under the title of the Right Honourable the Viscount Juan Fernandez, and that he was condemned to remain for life upon this desert island, there to enjoy alone his title and his coronet.

Mary had left him for three weeks only: already he had found the difference between hired service and the service of love. It is a difference which shows itself in a thousand little things, but they all mean one thing—that the former, at best, does what it is paid to do; while the latter does all that it can think of to please, to comfort, and to alleviate. Every day, and all day long, he had turned to Mary for everything, and never found her wanting. Now nothing was right: not even the position of his chair and table, or the arrangement of his cushions, or the comfort of his meals; and nothing would ever be right again. Perhaps it would have been better if he had given his consent, and suffered George to redeem his land, and so kept Mary.

'Uncle'—it was David who came in slowly, and sat down with deliberation—'the wedding is over. I have just come from the church. There was a rare show of people—most as many as on a Sunday morning.'

'Are they married?'

'Yes; they are married. I wouldn't make quite sure till I saw it with my own eyes. Married without your consent, aren't they?'

'Certainly. They have married without my consent.'

'Then, Uncle Daniel, since they are married without your consent, I'll trouble you for six thousand pounds—my aunt's legacy of six thousand pounds—with compound interest for six years at five per cent. It amounts to £7,657 13s. 9d. I have been to a lawyer at Newton Abbot, and he calculated it for me. You lent me, two days ago, a thousand pounds, which I take on account of the legacy, because you knew then that the banns were up, and the wedding fixed. The balance you will pay over at once. Otherwise my lawyer will bring an action against you. Hullo! uncle, what's the matter?'

'You took a thousand down, David, in full discharge. It was an arrangement. I owe you nothing.'

'Uncle, you are a man of business, I believe. What arrangement do you mean?'

'You told George, in this room, that there was such an arrangement. You set him against me with telling him that, David.'

'Where is the arrangement? Where are your papers?'

'David! David!' He fell back in his chair. He had fainted.

David went to the sideboard and got the brandy. When his uncle recovered he gave him a few drops.

'You are simpler than I thought, uncle,' he said. 'Did you really believe that I was going to give up this fortune, and to you —to *you*, of all men in the world—when I knew all along that they would marry without your consent?'

'David, you are a devil!'

'I am what you made me. As for the Devil, he has more to do with you than with me, I take it.'

'David! David!' he moaned, and wrung his hands, 'tell me you are joking.'

'Not I! See now, uncle; I am going away. I shall sell you the rest of your coupons, and I shall go away; but before I go I will have that money out of you, to the last farthing. It is not for myself, though: it is for Mary. You thought to cheat her out of her fortune, and to keep it to yourself; well, you are wrong. You shall pay far more to me than you would have paid to her, and she shall have it all.'

'You are killing me—oh! villain! villain!'

'The villain is the man who lays his plans to rob and plunder the helpless.'

'Kill me at once!' said the old man; 'kill me, and have done with me!'

'Kill you? Not I; killing would be foolish with such a chance as I've got now for revenge! As for villain—who robbed me of my land? You! When I went away, who refused me the small sum I wanted to start me in Canada? You! When I came home, who offered me the wages of a labourer? You! Villain?—*you* dare to call any man a villain!' David bent over the old man's chair with flaming eyes and purple cheeks, his hands held back lest he should be tempted to kill him. There was the same fury in his look as when, six years before, he stood before him with upraised cudgel on the Moor. If the Baron had seen David at that moment he would have ceased to ask how so slow a creature could have been spurred into the blind rage of murder. 'You dare to call any man a villain? As you drove me away—your nephew—so you have driven your niece away. As you took my land from me, so you have taken George's land from him. Villain!—well, I am a villain. I have lived with rogues and thieves and savages till I am no longer fit company for a decent man like George, or for an honest man like Harry the blacksmith. But I will go away as soon as I have got

the last farthing that can be got out of you: I shall go away—I don't know where—and spend it, I don't know how. As for killing you, man: I've had the heart to do it a dozen times since I came home. Every day when I walk among my fields I could kill you. But I've had enough of murder. Not twice!—not twice!' His eyes were wild and his face distorted with ungoverned rage. But still he kept his hands back, as if he dared not suffer them to approach his uncle. And when he had said all he had to say—for this was not all, only the rest was incoherent with splutterings and oaths—he rushed from the room, as if he could not bear even to be in his uncle's company.

And then the old man was left alone again. The wedding-bells were silent, and Conscience left him alone to his own reflections. I do not think that he acknowledged even to himself that he was rightly punished for a long life of avarice and greed. Whatever happened, he might bemoan his sad fate, but he would not acknowledge that it was the natural consequence of his iniquities. So, in the good old days, when the retired Admiral sat in his room, his foot wrapped in flannel, with a red-hot needle stuck into his great toe and refusing to come out, his jolly old nose swollen as big as a bottle, and beautifully painted with red blossoms, he never said to himself 'Admiral, this red-hot needle, this gout, this swollen nose, all these aches and pains and tortures and inconveniences, which will shortly put an end to you, are the result of the hogsheads, barrels, puncheons, and tuns of rum, brandy, and port which you have imbibed in the course of your earthly pilgrimage!' Not at all; he only cursed the gout, and lamented his own sad fate.

When the new housekeeper brought in the dinner he did not dare, as he would have done in Mary's time, to lay upon her the burden of his own misery and bitterness. She was a fine large woman, who knew what was due to herself, and Mr. Leighan had to treat her with respect. It is a truly dreadful thing not to have a single soul upon whom you may discharge your ill-temper, vent your spleen, and make a sharer in your own miseries. Never again would this poor old man, now tried beyond his powers, be able to command a sympathetic listener; never again would anyone pretend to care whether he was in a good temper or not.

'Now, sir,' said his housekeeper, 'sit up and eat your dinner.' It is thus that they address the paupers. Mary, he remembered daily, had been wont to carve for him, to ask him what he would take, and where he liked it cut. Now he was told to sit up and eat his dinner. He noticed these little things more than usual, because

when a man has received a heavy blow, his mind, for some mysterious reason, begins to notice the smallest trifles. I suppose it is because he loses all sense of proportion as regards other things. Once I read how a murderer was arrested in some lodging where he had taken refuge. On his way out of the house with the officer who had him in charge, he stopped to call his attention to a curious shell upon the mantleshelf. In the same way Mr. Leighan in his trouble of mind noticed the serving of his dinner.

He obeyed, however, and ate his dinner, which was half cold. Then he mixed himself a much stronger glass of brandy-and-water than usual, because he was so full of trouble, and filled his pipe. And presently, partly because his mind was so troubled, partly from habit, and partly by reason of the strong brandy-and-water, he fell asleep as usual.

There was no wedding-breakfast at Sidcote, or any festivities at all—not even a wedding-cake. George drove his bride and his mother home after the service, and presently they had dinner together, and George kissed his wife, and his mother cried, so that there was little outward show of rejoicing. Yet they all three rejoiced in their hearts, and felt stronger and more hopeful, just because they could now stand together.

In the afternoon, Mary asked George to go out with her.

'I must go and see my uncle,' she said. 'I cannot bear to think of him alone. Let us ask him to keep his money, but to let us part friends.'

They walked hand-in-hand across the stubble fields, and through the lanes, where the blackberry leaves were putting on their autumn tints of red and gold, and the berries of the hedge were all ripe and red—the purple honeysuckle, the pink yewberry, the blackberry, rowan, hip and haw—to Gratnor.

'Strange, George, that we shall go away, and never see the dear old place again!' said Mary, with a sigh. 'Let us go as soon as we can, so as to leave it before the trees are stripped, and while the sun still lies warm upon the hills.'

In the parlour, Mr. Leighan was still sleeping, though it was past his waking time. Mary touched George by the hand, and they sat down behind him in the window and waited.

They waited for a quarter of an hour.

Then they heard a step outside.

'It is David,' George whispered. 'He will rouse his uncle. Is he come already to ask for his fortune, I wonder?'

Just then Mr. Leighan awoke, perhaps disturbed by David's

heavy step; and he awoke just as he had done twice before—namely, suddenly and with a startled shriek of terror. Just as he had done twice before, he sat up in his chair, with horror and fright in his eyes, glaring wildly about the room.

Mary, accustomed to witness this nightmare, looked to see the terror change into bewilderment.

But it did not.

For a while his mind was full of his dream; while he yet remembered the place, the time, and the man, and before the vision had time to fade and disappear, the very man himself of whom he had dreamed stood before him at the open door. Then he no longer forgot; his dream became a memory: he was riding across Heytree Down in the evening; and he was met by his nephew with a cudgel, and the nephew cried out, 'Who robbed me of my land?' and struck him across the temples so that he fell.

'Murderer! Robber!' he cried. 'Help! help! I am murdered and robbed!'

And then, lo! a miracle. For the paralytic, who had had no power in his legs for six long years, sprang to his feet and stood with outstretched arms, crying for help to seize the murderer. And David stood before him with such a look of hatred and revenge as he wore on that night, and in his trembling right hand the cudgel ready to uplift and to strike.

It was over in a moment, for the old man fell helpless and senseless upon the floor, though David did not strike. The skull-cap was knocked off by the fall, and exposed the angry red scar of the old wound. He lay upon his back, his arms extended in the fashion of a cross, as he had fallen upon Heytree Down; and as he lay there, so he lay here—with parted lips, streaming hair, and eyes wide open, which saw nothing, though they gazed reproachfully upon his murderer. Then for a space no one spoke; but David bent over his uncle, breathing hard, and George and Mary looked on wondering and awe-stricken.

'A second time, David!'

David started and turned. It was the voice of his German protector, Baron Sergius Von Holsten, and the tall figure of the Baron stood in the door, accompanied by myself. But on this occasion I counted for nothing.

'A second time, David!'

David gasped, but made no reply.

'You came home, David,' said the Baron, 'to give yourself in

charge for murdering and robbing your uncle. You struck him over the head with your cudgel, so that he fell dead at your feet. You robbed him of a box of papers and a bag of money. The thought of the crime gave you no rest by day, and at night the ghost of your uncle came to your bedside, and ordered you to go home and give yourself up. You came home. Your uncle was not dead. Have you confessed the crime?'

David made no reply.

'Have you restored the papers?'

Again he made no reply.

'This is your uncle: he looks as if you had killed him a second time. Madam,' he addressed Mary, 'I am sorry to speak of such things in the presence of a lady, but I have in my pocket the confession of David Leighan.'

'He was not killed, after all,' said David. 'What matters the confession?'

'But he was robbed. Where are the papers?'

'Here they are—all that are left.' I observed that he had a big book of some kind under his arm; he laid this on the table. 'There are his papers. Now, what's the odds of a confession or two?'

'Is this man's presence desired by his uncle?' the Baron asked.

'No!' said Mary; 'he comes every morning and drives him nearly mad. He has some power over him—I know not what. He has made my uncle's life miserable for three months.'

'My duty seems plain,' said the Baron. 'I shall go to the nearest police-station and deposit this confession. They will, I suppose, arrest you, David. You cannot, I fear, be hanged; but you will be shut up in prison for a very long time. The wise man, David, flies from dangers against which he can no longer struggle. The door is open.' He stood aside. 'Fly, David! let fear add wings. The police will be upon you this night if you are still in this village! Fly, David! even if it is once more to face the ghost of your murdered uncle! Better a hundred ghosts than ten years of penal servitude. Fly, David!—fly!'

There remains little more to be told.

David has not since been heard of; and the question whether Mary's fortune was forfeited by her marriage has not been raised. Nor can it be raised now. For Mr. Leighan remained senseless for three days—the same period as that which followed the assault upon him. And when he came to his right mind, behold! it was

another mind. He thinks that the whole parish of Challacombe belongs to him:—all the farms and cottages, and even the church and the rectory. He is perfectly happy in this belief, and is constantly planning improvements and good works of all kinds. He exists only to do good. He lives with George and Mary, and enjoys not only good health, but also an excellent temper. He always has a bag of money on the table, the handling and music of which give him the most exquisite pleasure; and in the drawing up of imaginary mortgages, signing vast cheques, and watching his imaginary property grow more and more, he passes a happy and a contented old age. His affairs are managed by George, and Mary is his heiress. So that for the present generation, at least, there will be no more talk of going to Tasmania.

KATHARINE REGINA.

CHAPTER I.

'THE CUP—'

ONE of the most delightful things that can possibly happen to an engaged couple, especially when they are just about to carry on that engagement to its legitimate end, is the acquisition, by gift or by inheritance, by chance or luck or windfall, of a house, a good house, in a good situation, solidly furnished—every young woman of judgment much prefers solidity to æsthetics. Unfortunately these windfalls occur too seldom: the rich cousin does not always die intestate, just when it would be most convenient: the long-lost and benevolent uncle does not always turn up at the right moment: the miserly guardian does not always, just when it would be most useful, prove to be an old man of the largest heart and the most unselfish generosity: and in these days of general depression nobody has anything to give away except farms which are no longer of any use. For these reasons most of us have to begin our married course with the suburban villa of unstable equilibrium and uncertain drains, and to furnish it as best we may, bit by bit, or on the three years' system.

Imagine, then, if you can, the unbounded satisfaction with which Katie received the intelligence that her lover's uncle—his Uncle Joseph, whom she had never seen, for whose decease she had not shed a single tear, and who was angry with Tom for not following his own profession—had actually bequeathed to him, absolutely, the whole of his estate, including, with all kinds of real and personal property, a beautiful great house completely furnished, in Russell Square, on the east side, where they have long gardens, and

where the sun shines full upon the drawing-rooms in the afternoon. Besides the house there were lands and freeholds, railway shares, gas and water shares, shares in trams, money in funds, money on mortgage—why, there was enough, it was certain, to make up more than a thousand pounds a year. What happiness! More than a thousand pounds a year of additional income to a couple who were going to marry on about five hundred! And a big house, solidly furnished, in Russell Square!

People turn up their aristocratic noses at Russell Square, but there are nowhere more comfortable houses, and there is nowhere a more central situation. A truly wonderful piece of good fortune! To be sure, Uncle Joseph had only two nephews, and therefore he might have been expected to leave something to Tom. But then Uncle Joseph had never expressed any intention of dying. And, again, Tom had offended him because he would become a journalist, and his uncle could not understand how any young man who respected himself could follow a profession in which there was no money to be made, and no prizes to be won, except the editorship of a paper. Now the other nephew, for his part, in order to please his uncle, had become a solicitor, and was now in practice. But then the world had never learned that this other nephew, who was never seen at his uncle's house, by long-continued courses, having a fine, bold nature, free from the restraints of prejudice, had estranged his uncle far more than Tom. And now Tom had all, and the other—his name was James Hanaper Rolfe—had none.

Tom had all!

In thinking of this wonderful dispensation, Katie was fain to sigh, so happy she was, and to say: 'Poor dear Uncle Joseph! To think, Tom, that he has now gone to a world where a word of gratitude will never reach him! And yet, what a fine, clear insight into character Uncle Joseph must have possessed to recognise the splendid abilities and the genius of his nephew—you, Tom. Poor, dear Un—cle Jo—seph!'

No one, certainly, ought to be judged merely by what men say of them. People had been accustomed to say hard things of Uncle Joseph. They called him miser and curmudgeon—I wonder how a man feels who knows that he is called a curmudgeon (curmudgeon, derived from *cur*, an inferior species of dog; and *mudgeon*, from the Anglo-Saxon *mudge*, the meaning of which I have forgotten). Does that man grind his teeth! Perhaps, dear reader, in spite of your benevolent heart, they call you a curmudgeon. Do you feel badly about it? People said, moreover, that Uncle

Joseph was ill-tempered and bearish, because he had grown old and outlived his clients, and had lost some of his money. That was what they said. And yet here he was, in the very noblest manner, forgiving Tom for going his own way, making a will entirely in his favour, and retiring to a better world just when his absence would produce the most beneficial result possible. Good, maligned Uncle Joseph!

Really, when one comes to think, it was a kind of happiness quite out of the common—a lot which would incline one to believe in the favouritism of Fortune—but then Dame Fortune's gifts are always, like the Most Noble Order of the Garter, wholly unconnected with any of your confounded merit. As for Tom himself, he was twenty-seven, an age when one is still in the promising stage, but he was certainly working steadily in the direction of his career: he was engaged to the sweetest girl in the world—he acknowledged that himself, so that it must be true; and other girls hadn't even a chance of disputing the assertion, because they did not know Katie, who was not, as you shall learn, in Society; he had a profession which he loved, and he cherished ambitions which made his heart glow whenever he thought of them: and now he was actually going to get a thousand pounds a year—with nothing to do for it—and a beautiful great house to live in! Pure favouritism, my brothers. He didn't deserve it at all. Katie did, no doubt, because she was so very sweet.

Think of the gratitude which one ought to feel for an uncle who has been so thoughtful as to acquire all this money for one! Who has gone on slowly and peacefully, giving his whole life to this single object, buying a substantial house, furnishing it solidly, so that the things would last a dozen generations; investing the money as it came in wisely and safely, and finally, without the least hint beforehand of any such intention, so as not to raise hopes or to create impatience, at the very nick of time, the exact moment when the act would be most graceful, most useful, and most deeply appreciated, to retire from business—Uncle Joseph's idea of life was inseparable from business—and as the American humourist feelingly says, 'to send in his checks,' leaving everything to his nephew. I declare that the very thought of such a career, so unselfish, so disinterested, so wholly devoted to amassing wealth for another to enjoy, fills me with humility as well as admiration. For my own part, I confess that I could never rise to such a level of pure unselfishness. Much as I love my own nephews, there is not one among them all for whose dear sake I should be contented to live

the life of Uncle Joseph, to grub and to grab, to snatch and to save, to toil and to moil, to incur the reproaches of hardness and of meanness in order that he might afterwards sit down and fold his hands. No, I could not do it. Uncle Joseph will no doubt receive in another world the reward due to a life so unselfish, and to labour so altruistic.

'What have I done, Katie,' asked Tom, 'that my uncle should leave me all his money? He has another nephew. He never seemed particularly fond of me. He never forgave me for refusing to be articled to him. I only saw him two or three times a year, and yet he gives it all to me and none to Jem at all.'

'Tom,' said Katie, 'your uncle knew which of his family would make the best use of the fortune. You are going to be a great writer, and now you can work at your leisure and give the world your very best without being forced to dissipate your powers in drudgery and distasteful work.'

And yet—and yet—there does seem a suspicion of favouritism about such a wonderful stroke of luck.

Consider the position with more attention to detail.

Tom Addison was, as we have said, seven-and-twenty, and at present a journalist. As a journalist he had not yet risen to the lofty level of the leader-writer. But he was already known by the editor to have considerable descriptive power: he could 'do' a crowd, and could seize the humours of the mob and catch at passing character: he could talk about a boat-race or an athletic event as one who has knowledge—in fact, his own athletic record was by no means contemptible, and the silver cups which he possessed might have been pawned for a great sum. He had written verses and sketches and notes of travel for the magazines, and he had already published a novel. It was a lively work, full of cleverness and sparkle, and the papers all spoke well of it. But when the publisher's statement of account came in there appeared a loss of £86 15s. 10d., which Tom had to pay out of his own pocket, and this disastrous result prejudiced him for a time against the Art of Fiction. It seemed to be a desirable and attractive department of the literary profession into which none but millionaires should venture.

Tom's equipment for a literary career was more complete than most aspirants can show. He took a good degree in classical honours at Cambridge, and he spent a year at Heidelberg. He was called to the Bar, and he read some law and knew the practice of the courts: he had the true litterateur's feeling for style: he

had considerable experience in everything that belongs to sport: he was a genial kind of young man, who took his malt or his lemon-squash at the Savage Club in a sociable manner: his father had been lieutenant-colonel in a line regiment, and therefore he knew barrack life and language, and could understand officers and could talk their talk, and knew the ways of soldiers. A journalist and novelist should know every profession and every trade intimately. But there are few journalists or novelists who have at once the barracks and the university, the public school and the courts of law, German student life and London clubland, to work upon. With such a start and by the aid of his own cleverness and energy, Tom was justified in aiming at the highest journalistic prizes.

And while he contemplated many years of drudgery before these should fall to him, behold! a thousand pounds a year more and a big house—in houses beauty ought always to include bigness: there is no comfort where you cannot stretch your legs. A thousand pounds a year! Well, he could now do as he pleased. No more going off to 'do' the Epsom crowd on Derby Day; no more crowding on board the press-boat for the University race; no more hanging round the newspaper office for jobs; he could make his literary life for himself and bide his time. And above all, he could marry as soon as he pleased and without anxiety. What an incomparable inheritance! No anxiety: Katie's future assured, whatever happened to himself. And to marry at once, when it had seemed as if their engagement might possibly drag on for years! A long engagement is a hateful thing: give me one which is brief and rapturous, so brief that, when it ends with the wedding bells, both are still mindful of the first kiss, and still full of the first tender thoughts and the emotions of the first confession. Tom was horribly in love. Katie was the dearest of girls, and she had nobody in the wide world to look to but himself for protection and care; and now he could marry her at once! No wonder if his eyes filled with unaccustomed tears and his heart glowed when he thought of his inheritance and all it meant. Good, worthy, excellent Uncle Joseph! What had he done for a nephew who for his part regarded him with perhaps less affection than was due to so near a relation? Alas! Do any of us young men love our uncles as we should? Let this example be a lesson to us.

Already Tom had heard the banns put up at the parish church—for the first time of asking; 'if any man know just cause or impediment'—cause or impediment indeed! when no two young

people ever loved each other more truly, and when they had a thousand a year and a house in Russell Square! Impediment? when Providence, working through Uncle Joseph, had actually prepared the way—carpeted the staircase, so to speak—and arranged that the course of true love should run smoothly, sweetly, swiftly between the most lovely banks of honeysuckle, rose, and sweet-brier! Happy Tom! Happy Katie! It remained only to fix the day and to buy a few pretty dresses and to arrange for a simple wedding, where there would be no breakfast, because the bride had no cousins to ask—this you will immediately understand—and to arrange, in deference to each other, where they would go for the honeymoon. Should it be Paris, with gaiety and theatres? or should it be the seaside, where they could wander hand-in-hand over the sands and listen to the quiet waves lapping the shore and watch the soft moonlight lying over the waters? I think it would have been Paris, because the season was what we humorously call early spring, when French asparagus is exhibited in the shops, and by the seaside the east wind furrows the moonlit waters and causeth gooseflesh to those who wander along the sands.

Katie followed the romantic calling of daily governess. Owing to certain defects in her education, which had been fragmentary and subject to interruptions, she was quite the old-fashioned daily governess, and not in the least like the young lady of Girton. In fact, I am afraid she knew nothing that a Girton girl calls knowledge. She therefore gave lessons in those families which cannot afford the High School—they call it mixed (you may mix almost everything but girls)—and are far, far above the Board school in gentility, but cannot afford the modern certificated governess.

She was the daughter of a Gentleman. Mr. Willoughby Capel never allowed the world to forget that he was a Gentleman: there was no mistake possible about the fact; indeed, it was more than an accident of birth, it was a profession. He dressed, spoke, and played up to that sacred calling: he did nothing; he despised all men who work. I wish, indeed, that it were possible to dwell upon the life of this eminent Gentleman. It must suffice, however, to state that he rose at eleven and took his cup of tea and his finger of toast in his bedroom while he dressed: that he performed this Function slowly and thoughtfully, attired in a magnificent dressing-gown: that he sallied forth, when his toilette was complete, about noon, and returned at midnight regularly. There was no concealment about his method of spending the day: he simply went to the club—he belonged to a third-rate proprietary institution where the

members were gentlemen, like himself, in somewhat reduced circumstances; he took his dinner there, and played billiards in the afternoon and whist in the evening. He was not a hawk, though he played for money: he had no friends, except the men at the club; no one ever called upon him at his lodgings, which were in Southampton Row: he was a curiously handsome man, well preserved, tall and dignified; but for the crow's-feet round his eyes he might have passed for forty. And who he was, what he was, why he was, nobody knew, not even his daughter. There was no difficulty about money. The weekly bills were always paid, but Katie very well understood that if she wanted any money for herself she must get it without asking her father, who wanted all there was for himself. Consequently, while he took his simple dinner of a slice of salmon and the joint, with a pint of St. Estephe, at the club, and played his whist for shilling points, his daughter went out every day teaching the respectable Emptage family, and in the evening studied at the Birkbeck Institute, or worked at home, trying to fill up some of the cracks and gaps and holes in her education. One regrets to note that after her engagement to Tom there came a sad falling off in her thirst for knowledge. History ceased to have attractions for her; she was no longer haunted by the Rule of Three; and she troubled herself no longer as to the boundaries of Thibet. 'Tis ever thus. When Love the Conqueror shows his rosy cheeks and dimpled chin, the Muses suddenly lose their good looks. It is most surprising to see the change which then comes over the poor things. They become wan and haggard; they put on spectacles: their hair falls off; they are fain to hide their once lovely figures with boys' jackets or anything. Apollo smiles: they rush away shrieking, and nobody misses them.

I declare that Katie's love-story was one of the sweetest, most touching, and most tender of any that I have ever known. Reader! you cannot know the beautiful histories that have to remain unwritten; partly because the shortness of the reader's life must be considered by the author; partly—it is even more important—because the shortness of his own life must be taken into account. This love-story is one of the unwritten kind. Imagine, if you can, the lonely life of the girl left all day long by her father, and think how the young man came to her with love in his eyes and strength in his hand. The story contained every interesting element that belongs to love, including the First impression, the second thought, the dawn of Suspicion, the Growth of Knowledge, the Siege of the Heart and its Successful Storm—in a word, all the places laid down

upon the Carte du Tendre, together with some not to be found in that document, such as Joy and Wonder, Pride and Humility, Self-importance, Dignity, and Personal Responsibility. How can man or woman grow to completeness without the help of each other? And oh! the divine mystery of the pure selfishness of the pair who love! Do you think that Adam and Eve ever worried their heads, in the plenitude of their happiness, as to what might be going on behind the hedge? Never, I am sure, till they came to live on that side and became personally interested in keeping out of the way of the lion and the tiger, and were admonished by the example of the bunny to avoid the rattlesnake and the alligator.

'Sir,' said Mr. Willoughby Capel when Tom sought his consent, 'as my daughter has no fortune I have no right to object, though I should have preferred for my son-in-law, I confess, an independent gentleman, such as myself; or, at least, one who was making a livelihood by a recognised profession, such as the Bar or the Church. I am glad, however, to think that when I am gone my child will be in good hands.'

He said 'when I am gone' with conventional solemnity, having no desire to go or any expectation of going.

The verb 'to go,' used in this sense, is not disagreeable because a personal application is never made. Yet Mr. Willoughby Capel had to go—only a fortnight later he had to go in the most unexpected manner. In fact, he was called upon to depart on the lonely journey without any warning at all. It seemed that he had heart disease, and he fell down dead in his room.

Katie thus became an orphan. She was also a distinguished and exceptional orphan, because, so far as she knew, she had not one single relation in the whole world. Uncles and aunts and cousins she must have had somewhere, but she knew nothing of them. She had understood when quite a child that she was never to ask her father about her family. Some there are who would cheerfully surrender all their cousins: Katie, who never had any, did not greatly deplore their loss; but at this juncture even Tom could not replace the lost cousins, because Tom, you see, knew no more than herself about her father's property, and there was not a scrap of paper to show what this was, where situated, or whence derived.

It really was a strange thing: not a single scrap of paper with so much as a note to show who were the deceased gentleman's lawyers; not a line to tell who were his people; in fact, not a

word about himself or his income or anything. We speak familiarly of a man's desk, of his diaries, of his 'papers.' Everybody is supposed to be possessed of these things. Well, the late Mr. Willoughby Capel had nothing: in his chest of drawers were his clothes, and these, so far as could be gathered, constituted the whole of his property, except the sum of thirty pounds in gold, more than half of which went to bury him. This man went out of the world leaving nothing behind him but five or six suits of clothes. Could these be held up as the record of a useful life? Were these all he had to show for good works? Perhaps they might pass, because good works, we have been told, are but rags.

'Katie,' said Tom for the twentieth time, 'this is wonderful. Do you know nothing?'

'Nothing, Tom. Once he told me that my second name belonged to several of the women of my family. And that is all I ever heard about my family.'

'Katharine Regina. It isn't much to go upon, is it?'

Tom put an advertisement in the papers calling on the relations of Willoughby Capel, deceased, to communicate with the advertiser. Nobody responded. Then he thought that perhaps some business letter might arrive which would give them the information they wanted. But none came.

When a man like Mr. Willoughby Capel, of good manners, evidently born and bred among gentlemen and gentlewomen, separates himself from his fellows and lives in obscurity and maintains silence about his antecedents, there is one conclusion which it is impossible to avoid. Tom, the most charitable of mankind, was fain to draw that conclusion. He made no more inquiries. And Katie, just to tide over the time until her marriage, went to live at a certain Institution or Home for Ladies who have to maintain themselves. It was only a temporary refuge, and in her lightness of heart and the selfishness of her happiness, she laughed at it and called it the House Beautiful, or the Earthly Paradise, or Lucky Lodge, seeing at first only the outside of things, and as yet being ignorant of the things that lay hidden beneath that ridiculous outside.

And then the inheritance fell in. Oh, brave Uncle Joseph! And very soon the lessons would be given up and the House Beautiful would be exchanged for the house in Russell Square.

Yes, the inheritance fell in. Oh, good Uncle Joseph! And for a week there was happiness inexpressible. The Cup was at the Lip—and then—then . . . .

CHAPTER II.

'AND THE LIP.'

ALL things are transitory, but man—who has been much humoured—has grown to expect a certain length of rope. Therefore, an inheritance which only lasts a week, and then, before one has had time to draw a single cheque, vanishes away into the Ewigkeit, is not even respectably transitory; it is ridiculous—the poet, who must have a certain time over which to spread himself, would refuse so absurd a subject. An inheritance of a week, without touching a single guinea's worth of it, is as foolish as the imaginary winning of a great prize in a lottery. Pleasures of the imagination for a week; plans and schemes and vague rainbow-tinted phantoms of future joys for seven days, and then—nothing—nothing at all.

The lovers sat hand-in-hand, just a week after coming into their inheritance, upon the stairs of the great empty house in Russell Square. No one else was in the house except the caretaker, one of those old ladies who are not in the least afraid of loneliness and ghosts; and are only truly happy when they have got a fine roomy basement with a scullery, a coal-cellar, and two large kitchens all to themselves, and a great empty house over their heads. The furniture may crack all over that house, and the stairs may creak after dark: there may be clanking chains, groans, shrieks, sobbings, wails, and trampling feet at midnight: there may be shadowy sheeted figures in the empty rooms at twilight: the caretaker is not in the least concerned. These things, with the house and the furniture, are the property of the landlord: she is there to look after them, ghosts and all. At night she sleeps, and all day long she makes tea. Nobody ever saw a caretaker yet who was not making tea. The invisible caretaker, therefore, remained in the basement below making tea, while Tom and Katie sat upon the stairs. They might have sat on the drawing-room sofas or in the library easy-chairs had they chosen, but they preferred the stairs, perhaps on account of the novelty. It is only at an evening party, as a rule, that young people get the chance of sitting on the stairs.

They were sitting on the stairs at the drawing-room landing, hand-in-hand, and their faces were much more grave than befits young lovers. Something—the word means more, the additional explanatory adjective 'bad' is understood—something had happened to account for this gloom.

'Is it really and truly all gone?' asked Katie presently.

'It is all gone, dear—vanished away—just as if it had never existed; in fact, it never did exist. But there can be no doubt about it. Our grand fortune was just dangled before us for one week and then it was snatched away. In cherry-bob, it is always thought mean for the bobster not to let the bobber have the cherry.'

'Oh! Tom—it is wonderful!'

'It is indeed. I think of it with awe. Some wonderful things are also disgusting, Katie. Nobody ever heard of a more wonderful thing or a more disgusting. If it is any comfort to us, let us say it over and over again. Truly wonderful! Providential! Quite a dispensation! An overruling, an——'

'Don't, Tom. It will not mend matters to talk bitterly and sarcastically.'

'All right, Katie dear. Let us pretend that we like the new arrangement better than the old.'

'No—no. But tell me more, Tom. How did you find it out?'

'It was found out for me, you see, Katie. I've got one first cousin on my uncle's side. He is a solicitor, which ought to have pleased the old man, but he is also fond of sport and billiards and so forth. Jem Rolfe is his name. I knew he would be awfully savage at being left out of the will, and I thought to make it up a bit to him; and I hadn't got any solicitor of my own, and so I thought I would keep the thing in the family and I asked him to take charge of my affairs for me and wind up things, as they say. Jem isn't a bad sort of fellow. He doesn't bear malice against me, and he took over the job and went through the papers. First, he began firing notes at me every other hour, telling me what he had discovered—good investments here and bad investments there. In short, he found out what the estate means and where it is invested and all about it—details which did not concern me in the least. The notes are all part of the business I suppose, and will appear on the bill of costs. However, the notes contained nothing that would arouse any kind of suspicion, and I began to think we were going to be rich beyond the "dreams of avarice," as Dr. Johnson said. And then there came a check—there always is a check.'

'Well, Tom?' for he stopped, though it was some comfort for him to feel that he was telling the story in a good descriptive style which would have done credit to the paper. 'What was the check?'

'You don't know Jem. His style is rather sporting. But of

course, being a lawyer, he knows what he is about. Two days ago he sent a letter begging me to call upon him; and then he staggered me by telling me that there was a charge on my uncle's estate of certain trust-money amounting, with accumulations, to about twenty thousand pounds. It was originally twelve thousand pounds, out of which an annuity of three hundred pounds had been paid, and the rest was to accumulate for the annuitant's heirs in some way. My cousin remembered this annuitant when he was articled to my uncle. So that our inheritance was twenty thousand less than it seemed to be. That's a pretty big cantel to be cut off. But worse remained. For Jem went on to tell me that, considering the depreciation of certain stocks and the losses my uncle had incurred in his investments, he did not think there would be much left when that trust-money was set aside. First he said "not much"—that was to let me down easy; he then told me that there would be nothing at all left—nothing at all—when this liability was discharged.'

'Oh! who are the people who are going to get the twenty thousand pounds?'

'I don't know. That is Jem's business—not mine. I have washed my hands of the whole thing, and he has undertaken to carry it through and get his costs out of the estate. So that after all, the nephew who is to benefit by my uncle's will is the one he wished to keep out. As for the heirs, when twenty thousand pounds are waiting for them, they will not be slow to turn up.'

Katie sighed. 'Is that all, Tom?'

'That is all, my dear. It couldn't be much more, because the part cannot be greater than the whole.'

Katie laughed this time—not a merry noisy laugh, but a low cheerful laugh peculiar to woman, the consoler kept for occasions when heavy moods and disappointment and bitter words in man have to be exorcised.

'Tom, it is like the splendid dream of the man with the basket full of eggs: our castle is shattered.'

'My dear'—Tom looked into the clear eyes, so full of courage and of faith, which met his gaze—'My dear'—here he kissed her—'it is for you that I lament it most. You were going to be so happy, with nothing to do and nothing to worry you: the life of comfort was to be yours—doesn't every woman desire the life of comfort above all things? Now we must go on with our work again, no better off than our neighbours, just as poor and just as struggling.'

'Why should we grumble at that, Tom?'

'And we must put off our marriage, Katie.'

'Yes, Tom; but then we never hoped to be married so soon, did we?'

'And you will have to continue your horrible lessons.'

'Oh! Tom, don't trouble about that. So long as I have you I am happy—and remember, we have had a whole week of pure happiness, thinking we were lifted high above the common lot. And now it is all over, and we are not a bit worse off than we were before.'

'When Christopher Sly, Katie, was taken back to the roadside, he was never so happy again for thinking of the wonderful dream he had. To be sure, Christopher was an uneducated kind of person. Fortunately none of the fellows at the club know about it; so that while on the one hand, as they used to say, there have been no congratulations and no envy, so, on the other, there will be no condolences and no secret joy.'

'Then, Tom, forget the whole thing. Put it out of your mind.'

'I will, Katie, as soon as I can. But still, without any more crying, tell me, Katie, did you ever hear of a more awful sell?'

'Tom, I certainly never did. I am quite sure there never was such a sell before. But at sells, you know, one is expected to laugh, just to show that you enter into the spirit of the thing and are not a bit offended.'

She sprang to her feet, shaking out the folds of her dress. It was only a plain stuff dress, nothing at all compared with the magnificent frock she might have worn had the intention of Uncle John been carried out.

'Come, Tom, it is done with. But I have a fancy to go all over the house, just to see what might have been ours, and then we will bid farewell to the inheritance.'

She stood over him, a tall graceful girl, light-haired, bright-eyed, her face full of the sunshine which lies on the cheeks of every woman who is true of heart and thinks no evil and is young and is loved.

'Come, Tom,' she repeated.

He sat hanging his head dolefully.

'You are always right, Katie. But that isn't all,' he added, under his breath, as he took her hand and went up the stairs with her.

It was not unlike the scene where Virginia takes leave of her island home and her gardens; but in this case it was Paul, as you shall see, who was about to embark for foreign shores.

They went upstairs to the very top of the house where be the servants' bedrooms. They opened every door, looked round each room and shut the door again softly.

'With each floor,' said Tom,' 'we take leave of two hundred pounds a year. There are five floors. Farewell, first two hundred.'

Below were the guests' rooms, furnished with due regard to comfort as it was understood in the forties—that is to say, in the four-post and feather-bed style, with vast chests of mahogany drawers. 'Farewell, second two hundred,' said Tom.

Below the visitors' rooms were the nurseries, day and night-nursery; but these rooms looked forlorn and neglected, because it was seventy years since they had echoed to the patter of children's feet and the music of children's voices. As Tom looked into them a sadness fell upon his soul, as if he were robbed—with the inheritance—of his children. He did not communicate this thought to Katie; but he said nothing, and descended to the lower floor in silence.

On the first floor there was a large drawing-room in front, and at the back a bedroom which had been Uncle Joseph's, furnished in the same style as those above. The drawing-room had been newly furnished by Uncle Joseph, when he married, about the year 1844, in what was then the best style. Nothing had since been added, so that this room was a pleasing study of domestic furniture in mediæval ages before æsthetics had been invented. There were high-backed sofas and solid chairs and settees, and round tables covered with expensively-bound books. There were engravings on the walls which were clothed with a rich warm red paper, and the carpet showed a pattern of large red and green flowers unlike any of the flowers with which Nature adorns the gay parterre. But everything was faded—wall-paper, carpet, the binding of the books, the gilding of the settees. The drawing-room, in fact, had not been used for thirty years.

There was a grand piano in it. Katie sat down and struck a few chords. It was out of tune, but that seemed appropriate. Then she looked at Tom, whose seriousness seemed to increase rather than to vanish, and her eyes became soft and dim, and she bent her head lest he should see the tears that filled them. Tom was standing at the window. He beckoned to her, and she joined him.

'It is a beautiful garden, dear. At this time of year'—it was the middle of March, and five o'clock in the afternoon, and one could distinctly see green buds upon some of the more sanguine

bushes—'at this time of the year there would have been delightful walking in the garden, wouldn't there? But the fortune is gone, and . . . Katie, sing that German song I taught you. I think we shall like to remember that you sang it in the house that was our own for a week.'

Katie went back to the piano and sang, with full and steady voice, a certain German song Tom had taught her, both words and music beginning:

'Adé! mein Schatz, adé! wir müssen scheiden.'

'Yes,' said Tom, '"Adé! wir müssen scheiden."'

She thought he meant that the fortune and he were bound to part, and she laughed. Then she closed the piano, and they went downstairs to the library, where the great solid mahogany shelves stood laden with the standard works of fifty years ago. Men like Uncle Joseph buy no modern ephemeral stuff.

'Tom,' said the girl, 'it was in this room that you were to sit and write your books, while I was to read or to work quietly beside you. It would have been happiness enough for me only to be with you.'

'Katie!'

'The dream has been a beautiful dream. It has brought us together so closely. I know now more of your ambitions than ever I knew before. We have talked with more open hearts. Let us thank God, Tom, for sending us this dream. Do not let us repine because it all came to nothing. We have been rich, and we are now poor. Yet we are richer than ever we were before. What is it that was said long, long ago—but not of a miserable treasure—'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away'? You will have all that you desire, Tom. You shall write the most beautiful books still, but not quite in the way we thought.'

'My dear, you are a saint and an angel.' (He took her in his arms. Why did the tears rise to his eyes?) 'You sang that song just now—Katie, you meant to bid adieu to the inheritance. But, my dear, it was for me. I am your treasure—you are mine—and we must part.'

'Tom!'

'We must part awhile, dear. Only for a little while—for six months or so.'

'Tom!'

'They offered me, just before this will-o'-the-wisp fortune came

to us, the post of War Correspondent in Egypt. I have now accepted it.'

'Oh, Tom!'

'I could not afford to refuse. They want me to go very much. You see, Katie, I know something about soldiering, and I can talk French, which is always a help everywhere, and they think I am smart and active.'

'Oh! Tom—to go out to the fighting!'

'A War Correspondent,' he said mendaciously, 'has to be more than commonly careful. Why, I shall be all the time thinking of how to get safe home to my Katie.'

She shivered.

'They will give me a hundred pounds a month, and all my expenses,' he said. 'We shall save enough out of it to buy all our furniture, dear, and when I come home we will have the wedding bells rung.'

He tried to speak cheerfully, but there was a melancholy ring in his voice.

'If I could only think that you would be cared for when I am away, Katie, my poor, friendless girl.'

'As for me, I shall do very well, Tom. All day long I shall be with my children; and in the evening there is Harley House, and some of the girls there are pleasant and friendly when they are not too tired with their work, poor things, and when they have got any work to do.'

'Dear, tell me that I have done right in taking this offer. It is not only a well-paid offer and an honour to receive it, but if I do the work well it will give me a far better and safer position on the paper. They never forget a man who has been a good War Correspondent.'

'Yes, Tom, I am sure that you have done wisely. Do not fret about me. Oh, I shall get on very well indeed without you. Write to me by every mail that you can—not a long letter which would take you time—but a single word to keep my heart up.'

'My dear, my love!' He caught her with both hands and kissed her. 'My dear, my love,' he repeated, 'I must leave you alone. If you want anything, go to my cousin; I am sure he will help you. I have written the address here—don't lose it.'

'But when must you go, Tom? Not yet for a week or two?'

He held her tightly in his arms.

'Now, my dear, to-day—to-day. I have only time to get things together. I start by the eight o'clock train, and travel day and

night. We must part here, dear, in the castle of our dream'—he smiled sadly—'and we must part at once. Courage, Katie, it is but for a few months. And then—and then . . . Kiss me once more, dear. Oh! kiss me. Good-bye, dear, good-bye!'

The solicitor, Tom's cousin, saw him off at Charing Cross.

'Remember,' said Tom earnestly, 'if there should be anything left over after paying that trust-money to the heirs, and if anything should happen to me, you will give all to Katie. I have given her your address, and she will go to you if she wants anything. Write to me about the heirs of the trust when you find them. I am curious to know who they are. And—and—don't forget—in case, you know—this letter is for Katie, and everything that belongs to me is to be hers as well. I ought to have insured my life, and made my will, but there was no time. Will you charge yourself with this, Jem?'

'Oh, you'll be all right, old man,' said his cousin with the cheerfulness—nobody is so cheerful as the man who is not going—proper to the occasion. 'I wish I had your chance. Good-bye. I won't forget, and I won't lose the letter.'

'You promise, then,' said Tom. 'I trust my girl to you.'

'I promise faithfully, Tom. You may trust her to me.'

'It is a solemn promise, Jem?'

'A sacred pledge.'

Their hands met with the grasp of two men who trust each other.

Then the guard waved his hand, and the train rolled out of the station. Jem Rolfe stood looking after it until it vanished across the river. Then he went to the refreshment-room, and had a whisky and potash. He was one of those young men who in all times of thought, perplexity, or forecast, assist the brain with a whisky and potash, or its equivalent.

Katie remained in the empty library. The beautiful inheritance had vanished like a dream. And Tom had gone to Egypt. She sat in the quiet room until the day drew to its close. Then she got up and went softly into the hall and out into the street. And the caretaker, who was still making tea in the basement, and heard the patter of her feet and the gentle closing of the door, thought she was one of the ghosts, who generally, however, do not begin to walk about an empty house until after sunset.

CHAPTER III.

HARLEY HOUSE, CLEVELAND SQUARE.

Two months later. At eight o'clock, on a cold spring evening, the drawing-room of Harley House, Cleveland Square, is generally as full as you may find it all the year round.

It is a salon of more than common interest. To begin with, there are no men in it. Male visitors are not allowed to penetrate into the drawing-room of Harley House. This removes it at once from the common drawing-room of society. Next, the ladies who use this drawing-room do not appear in evening dress: most of them, in fact, have only one dress, which serves them for morning and evening, summer and winter, until it falls to pieces, and how it is replaced no man knoweth. Again, in other drawing-rooms there is idleness; but here, for the most part, there is work of some kind generally going on. And in other drawing-rooms there is light and airy talk, all about nothing, with laughing, singing, and little jokes such as girls love; but here the talk is subdued in tone, sometimes discontented, sometimes angry, sometimes exasperated. If any laugh, it must be one of the younger ladies newly joined, and then the rest all look up with astonishment. As for a joke, no one ever made one in Harley House. If it was made, it would fall flat.

There are about half a dozen of these drawing-rooms to be found in London. They belong to as many Institutions, all of which are most useful and do any quantity of good, and are real blessings to the people for whom they are founded: and yet—being Institutions, they cannot help it—they are so clogged and hedged about with rules and regulations that life in them is somewhat like life in a prison or a workhouse. The rules, to be sure, are most beneficent, and framed for the general welfare. No lady who respects herself would, for instance, desire to use a candle in her bedroom after the gas is turned out, or to lie in bed after half-past eight in the morning, or to be out after half-past nine in the evening—how *can* people remain out after half-past nine? Nor would anyone wish to sit in the drawing-room after half-past ten at night, or to be out of bed after a quarter to eleven, or to receive visitors of the opposite sex—the last, indeed, is a most impossible desire, and one never yet felt in the feminine breast. Male visitors? Creatures in hats and coats? Young men? Is there any girl so

weak and so giddy and so thoughtless as to desire the companionship of young men? Therefore the regulations of Harley House are accepted in a loving and graceful spirit: it is felt that not only does the House provide for the residents lodgings and board on the cheapest terms, but it guards them from the dangers which beset a mixed society where men and women actually fall in love and marry each other, and where girls who might be looking forward to healthy, honest work all their lives, and to earning as much as a pound a week, if they are lucky, are actually taken away and placed in suburban villas, and made to do nothing at all but order the dinner, dust the drawing-room, look after the baby, and blow up the housemaid. Why, in Harley House the fortunate residents are hard at work all day long, and have also the pleasure—it must be a real pleasure to all of them—of making their own beds and keeping their cubicles tidy. No babies to nurse, however, no great hulking husband to be messing around, no dinners to order, and no one to consider but themselves and their own personal happiness and comfort. The drawing-room at Harley House, thus free from care, ought to be the happiest, liveliest, mirthfullest, brightest, merriest, joyfullest place in the whole world.

Somehow, it is not.

Harley House is governed by a Committee of six matrons of proved virtue and religion. It is a Home for Ladies who have to work for their living; in other words, for Ladies who have to live cheaply. The founders recognise the fact that a pound a week, taking one week with another, is rather more than most working ladies can ever expect to make. They have, therefore, ascertained the very lowest charges for lodging and meals on which the House can be kept up, and they charge the residents accordingly. Thus it has been proved by experiment that a young woman of tolerably robust appetite can be fed, not luxuriously, with jam, cake, chocolate-cream, ices and cold chicken, but sufficiently, so as to keep the machine in good working order, for fifteenpence-halfpenny a day—it is really fifteenpence, but the odd halfpenny is added for luxury and the putting on of fat. The Committee of Harley House therefore give the young ladies breakfast for threepence, and tea for the same; dinner is sevenpence, and supper is twopence-halfpenny. For three-and-sixpence a week a girl can have a bed in a cubicle all to herself. In other words, without counting dinner, a meal which in hard times may be neglected, a young lady can live in Harley House for eight shillings and twopence-halfpenny a week; so that if she is so lucky as to be making a whole pound a

week, there remain eleven shillings and ninepence-halfpenny to spend. If you deduct sevenpence a day for dinner and eightpence for Sunday, there still remain seven shillings and sevenpence-halfpenny. The girl who cannot make seven shillings and sevenpence-halfpenny a week suffice for washing, dress, gloves, boots, amusements, religion, charity, travelling, omnibuses, literature, music, and recreation generally, must be a wicked and a wasteful girl.

The House is administered by a matron, who orders the dinners, admonishes the servants (and sometimes, for wicked and wasteful ways, the young ladies), reads prayers night and morning, turns out the gas, and collects the money beforehand. If she is a kindly and sympathetic woman, as sometimes happens, she can become to the girls a second mother. If, as very often happens, she is a person of austere manners, rigid virtue, and unflinching adherence to the regulations, she can convert the home into a prison, the drawing-room to an exercise yard, and the cubicles into cells. Sometimes the home is visited by the Committee, who go round and taste the soup, so to speak, confer as to the accounts, and consider the cases of those ill-advised young people who have requested permission to stay out for an hour later than is allowed by the rules.

Among the many useful and beautiful inventions which wait for the Man—I am sure that the Woman will never bring any of them along—is an Institution or Home for Working Ladies which they will love. It is very much wanted, because in these latter days there are so many ladies who have to work. And the number is daily increasing, so that it will be wanted very much more. In fact, we seem to be getting so poor that in all probability the next generation will know of no other ladies than those who work.

In my mind's eye I see the Perfect Home clearly.

First, there are no rules or regulations at all in this house.

No rules at all. Except one, which is not a rule so much as a condition, as one has to breathe in order to live, a thing which no one objects to until he gets asthma. This condition is, that bed and board must be paid for beforehand. The absence of rules is the only thing wanted to make such a Home perfect. The drawing-room will be thrown open every evening to callers and visitors—the fashionable time for calling will be half-past eight: of course visitors of the opposite sex will be welcomed and entertained with sweet speech, sweet smiles, and sweet looks: there will be music and, if the young people like, dancing; as everybody must go to work next morning, the dances will be small and early; every girl

will thus have her chance of the wooing which to some is the necessity of their souls: the young fellows engaged all day in the City will find out where they can pass the evening in delightful society with the sweetest girls possible, and will turn coldly from the billiard-room and the music hall. As for the administration of the house, it will be conducted by the residents themselves, who will admit only ladies of their own style and manners; so that if one of them prove of ill-temper, evil tongue, and low breeding, she will be ordered to depart at once and find her own level; and if one should bring 'Arry and 'Arriet to the house, she will be invited, firmly and sternly, to descend to another home more suitable to herself and her friends. For there will be a great number of these homes, graduated upwards as beautifully as Standard Reading-Books, from that in which 'Arry, free of manners, easy of speech, mirthful and hearty and boisterous—bless him!—will find a welcome and a congenial atmosphere, to that in which the most æsthetic young lady will converse and exchange other people's ideas with the most highly-cultured young man. And all without any rules; and, in all, elderly and middle-aged ladies whose presence will steady and restrain the younger members.

The drawing-room at Harley House is of course a large room, because it belongs to one of the large houses of Cleveland Square, Bloomsbury. The curtains, the wall-paper, and the carpet look as though they had done service enough, and might now be dismissed. But everybody in the House knows very well that there is no money to buy new things, and that, like the stair-carpet, which is in holes, they will probably have to last a long time yet. Now, in the Home without rules, the ladies will unite to contrive new curtains and carpets, and a better wall-paper, and will be always trying to make the place pretty with the little odds and ends which cost nothing but a little taste and ingenuity. So that there will be none of the shabbiness which does undoubtedly hang over Harley House. But what matters shabbiness, since there are no men admitted?

The residents of Harley House are not all girls. Some of them, who have been here for a long time, and occupy chairs near the fire by prescriptive right, are middle-aged, and even elderly. Most of them, however, are quite young: they are a floating and uncertain class: they come because they are hard up, stay a few weeks or months because they cannot help themselves, sniff at the regulations, speak contemptuously of the Committee, and then, if prospects brighten, hasten to some place where the presence of young men

is not forbidden, and where one can be out after half-past nine without seeking permission beforehand and explaining the reasons for this wild burst.

To the former class undoubtedly belonged two ladies sitting side by side, bolt upright, with a certain primness of attitude which recalled, to those who could remember the early days of Her Majesty's reign, memories of governesses in the forties. In fact, they had been daily governesses in the forties when they were young. Now they were gray-haired, and each wore a little prim curl at the side, and to those who might remember the forties they looked as if they ought to have had a black velvet band across the forehead, with a steel buckle. They were dressed in black, they were exactly alike, and they were quite clearly sisters. In their hands was some work, but it advanced slowly. Their thin faces were beautiful with the beauty given by patience, resignation, and suffering—they had now found rest and a haven for the remainder of their days. The regulations caused no discomfort to them, because they asked for no male visitors, did not desire to be out after half-past nine, and wanted nothing more than a place where they could sit down and meditate on the long rest awaiting them after their hard day's work. They were Miss Augusta and Miss Beatrice Apsey. In the distant time when they owned a living father, they lived in a Cathedral Close, and their father was a Canon.

On the other side of the fireplace sat another lady, who was also clearly one of the permanent residents. She was gaunt and hard of features, with discontent and restlessness marked in her face. She had a book in her lap, but she read very little. For her, too, the past was nearly done, and the only future before her was that which has to be reached by crossing a certain river.

At the table, a bundle in her lap, sat a woman, still young, not more than thirty, at work diligently, even fiercely, never lifting her head from her work, but sewing as if for life. Persons experienced in such matters would have recognised that her work was of a very difficult and beautiful kind, embroidery of the highest art, which should be worth large sums of money. She was dark of complexion, and beautiful still, with a shapely head and regular classical features, and had she raised her eyes from her work, you would have perceived that they were such as a painter loves to gaze upon and to draw, deep and dark and limpid. But they were full of sadness; there was no light of laughter in them, and on her

lips there was no light of smiles. It was the face of a woman no longer happy. While she worked, her lips moved continually, as if reproaching somebody—perhaps herself.

The table had a few magazines and papers upon it. There were the *Illustrated* and the *Queen*, and certain harmless and goody periodicals, such as Committees of Institutions consider adapted to the intellect of lady residents. Nobody, however, though the room was pretty full, was reading. Perhaps this was due to the fact that it was Thursday evening, so that the weekly papers were stale. Perhaps, however, it was because the people in the room were all tired, and cared not to do anything.

They were nearly all girls between eighteen and four or five and twenty. It was for them, and not for the elder ladies, that the Institution really was founded and the regulations framed, so that they ought to have shown in their faces and their demeanour the liveliness of gratitude. No doubt they were grateful—'and all that'—but they were heavy-eyed.

There were about fifteen or twenty of them: they were all young ladies who work, not ladies of the ballet, or ladies of the bar, or ladies who pose upon the stage in lovely costumes, or ladies who stand behind counters; nor were they Young Persons or Young Girls: they were young ladies—that is, girls born and educated in some kind of refinement, whose fathers and brothers follow the pursuits allowed to gentlemen. The most fortunate among them were the girls in the Civil Service, Post Office and Telegraph Service. These get regular pay and are not afraid of losing their work. For this reason very few of them find their way to Harley House. The rest were typewriters, clerks in offices, cashiers in shops, governesses of the cheaper kind, who have not qualified at one of the new colleges for women and have no certificates and cannot hope to become mistresses in the High Schools where teachers are properly paid, but which are driving the poor governesses of the past out of the field; teachers of music who have not been to the Royal Academy or the Royal College, teachers of drawing and artists who have carried away prizes for dexterity at South Kensington and think that they only want a picture to be accepted by the Academy in order to become famous in a day and to make their fortunes in a year. Meantime, those who do not teach haunt the National Gallery in hopes of getting a commission to copy a picture. Others were private secretaries and collectors of materials for men and women who make speeches, write articles, and advocate causes: others, again, were in the 'literary' line.

This includes those who write stories for any who will buy them—little books for religious publishers at five pounds the book, and verses for children's magazines at a halfpenny a line; who collect and search and investigate for all kinds of students, writers, genealogists, and everybody who wants anything found out; who copy manuscripts, and who, generally, stand outside the door of publishers and editors, waiting. 'They also serve, who only stand and wait.' Pity that they do not get paid as well. Who can enumerate the thousand ways in which poor ladies try to earn their bread? The twenty girls in this room might be taken, however, to represent in a way all these ways.

They had nearly all come home from work by this time. In most assemblies of girls there will be heard a susurrus of universal chatter, with occasional bursts of merry laughter and a snatch of song: the most remarkable thing about this room was the silence of the girls. A few talked languidly in whispers, but most of them sat each apart and alone in silence: two or three, laid full length upon their backs on the sofas, seemed contented simply to be at rest—these were the cashiers of shops who have to stand all day; others sat back in their chairs leaning their heads upon their clasped hands, an attitude which betokens complete physical exhaustion. Nobody was reading, nobody was laughing, nobody was singing. The general depression was not due at all to the regulations of the Home: it had nothing to do with the Committee: the girls were not in the least longing to be out after nine-thirty, nor were they pining for the society of young men. They were simply tired.

Desperately tired. There is no other word which adequately describes the situation. Every evening those of the girls who have got work come home desperately tired. Those who have none are despondent. When the evenings are long and the weather is fine, the girls shake off some of their languor and lassitude by walking round the squares, which are quiet places, and for the most part free from the Prowler. Moreover, it is refreshing to look through the railings at the gardens. When the evenings close in early and the nights are cold and rainy, there is nothing to do but to bring their fatigue to the gas-heated atmosphere of the drawing-room and sit there until it is bed-time. Perhaps if the place was a little livelier and the male visitor was admitted, the drawing-room would be a means of shaking off their fatigue and taking them out of themselves.

Desperately tired. Most of the girls who work get longer hours than the men, and shorter pay. If two creatures do exactly the

same amount of work they ought to have the same strength. But Nature refuses to girls the strength which she has given to men: custom prevents them from making the most of their strength by the help of much beef and beer; it even insists that women shall not endeavour to make themselves strong by taking beef and beer in reasonable quantities, and causes them to dress in irrational ways; does not suffer them to take exercise, confines them in hot rooms with bad air, and very often makes them stand all day long. Therefore, they are much more fatigued in the evening than the young men, who will cheerfully go to music-halls, theatres, billiard-rooms, volunteer drills, evening classes, gymnasia, and all kinds of places, after a long day's work. There is another thing which has not been sufficiently considered. It is a great and neglected law. Nature, whenever she turns out a new baby of the feminine sex, says to her as a last admonition: 'And, my dear, when you grow up remember that you will hate, loathe, and detest any kind of work except one. I design you to be a wife and a mother and a helpmeet for one man. You may miss your vocation and you may console yourself with other interests. But if you have to work for pay and under orders you will be unhappy.'

They all hate having to work. The better educated they are, the more they hate it.

The law cannot be broken for ever. In a better state of society it will not only be recognised but even enforced. In other words, women will not be forced to work. Only those women shall work who choose, and their pay, if they work at trades, shall be the same as that of the men.

Women would then be entirely dependent upon the men. Why not? There would probably be a tax for the maintenance of those women who remained unmarried and preferred idleness. It would be levied on the unmarried men, and there would be so few that it would not be felt. But then no man would be allowed to marry under the age of twenty-eight.

It will be truly a revolutionary step, and though at first it makes one giddy to think what would happen afterwards, the happiness of the women would be assured. Of course the women would be encouraged, even taught as a sacred duty, to lay themselves out for certain kinds of work. Mere idleness, they will be trained to understand, is sinful. If they are ambitious they will cultivate learning, literature, science, history, philosophy, poetry, the arts of fiction and painting and sculpture, the drama and acting, singing and music, fine work, embroidery, and lawn-tennis.

Some, again, will study the science and mystery of cooking: some will follow the work of the house and give themselves up to the care of other people's babies, until their own time arrives: some will become nurses and even physicians: they will be taught that it is good not to waste their lives should they not marry and have children: they will be honoured, flattered, caressed, and praised. They will perhaps be assured that they are the equals, nay, the superiors of men, whose intellect, they will be told, is a poor thing compared with that of women. But they will never be hired to do hack-work, and they will not be allowed to enter the labour market at all. No woman, in the future, shall ever receive a wage, and shall never be submissive to any master except one of her own choice, and then only as much as shall please her. But with those who love, submission is natural and mutual obedience is sweet. There shall be no wages; no hire; no competition; no standing in the market like kitchenmaids at a statute fair. Men, so long as they are so foolish as not to combine, may compete with, outbid, undersell, and ruin each other. They are so strong that it hurts them less. But women should not follow their example, and in the good time coming they shall not.

It was about a quarter to nine when the door opened and another girl came in. She was a tall and beautiful girl—you have already seen her—with light curly hair and gray eyes and a face full of sweetness: made for love—if that means anything, because nearly every girl's face shows the same benevolent intention of Nature. Now, alas! her face was full of trouble. The other girls' faces showed the depression which comes of fatigue and monotonous work, but there was trouble of another kind on Katie's face. When she appeared, one or two of them looked at her inquiringly and read the answer to their question in her eyes.

She sat down beside another girl. Evidently they were friends, these two.

'Is there news?' she whispered.

Katie shook her head.

Lily, the other girl, pressed her hand in silent sympathy. She was a dark-haired, swarthy, low-browed girl, with deep-set eyes, black eyebrows which met, and Spanish features, though her name was Lily and she ought to have been fair and dressed in white. Lily would have looked well in a mantilla and in black velvet, and a diamond coronet. She was born for black velvet, yet by one of Nature's mistakes she had to wear black stuff.

'There never will be any news, Lily. Don't speak to me just yet, dear.'

At this moment the two old ladies by the fire rose from their chairs, and the elder, generally known as Miss Augusta, went to the piano and began to play. She always played every evening, because she thought that music is good for the soul and for the temper, and for the tired limbs and the irritated brain. But the music must be good, and therefore she played Mendelssohn's Songs without Words, which go straight to the heart in a way hardly achieved by any other music. She played in a quiet old-fashioned way, with the emphasis which belonged to the time—it was a sentimental time—when she was young.

The other old lady, her sister, Miss Beatrice, began to walk about the room and to talk to the residents. It was her opinion that young persons can be greatly helped by sympathy and kindness, and that, being an old person herself, she might perhaps administer words of comfort and peace while her sister was moving their hearts by the power of music. And, indeed, there were times when the atmosphere was heavy with despondency.

First, she sat down beside the woman who was so fiercely working.

'My dear,' she said, 'you have been working at your business all day. Your cheeks are flushed and your hand is burning. Cannot you put away your work for a single evening?'

'No—no. I must work. I must work. The others may rest—but I must work. I must work.'

'Why must you work, my dear? You are so much better off than the rest of us. You have such a handsome salary. Why must you work?'

It was known that this person had a salary of three pounds a week, actually three pounds! As much as is given to a curate, and yet there was no evening except Sunday when she did not work fiercely, until the last moment before the gas was turned out.

'You are a Christian?' the worker asked in reply.

'Surely,' said Miss Beatrice. 'Oh, my dear, that is a strange question! What other comfort is there for us poor women, and what other hope?'

'For those who are His, He is crucified. Those who are not His—must be crucified by themselves.'

It was a strange answer to be made in a respectable Home where the fiercer emotions, including despair, are supposed not to enter. They are excluded—with the young men.

'My dear, my dear,' the poor lady trembled at the mere strength of the words, 'you terrify me. I do not understand what you mean.'

'Then, Miss Beatrice,' said the embroideress, 'it means that I must work—day and night—and never stop.'

Miss Beatrice sighed, and went on her way. She stopped next before the elderly and gaunt-looking person who sat on the other side of the fire.

'Are you better this evening, Miss Stidolph ?' she asked.

'No. I am worse.'

'Was there the opening you expected ?'

'No, there was not. There never is, for age. It is a sin now to grow old.'

'Oh, no ! But people do like their children to be taught by young and light-hearted women. As we grow older we lose some of our light-heartedness, do we not ? And some of our pleasant looks, perhaps.'

'I never had any pleasant looks, or any lightness of heart,' said Miss Stidolph with a little laugh. 'Life has always been a burden to me. Don't waste time on me, Miss Beatrice. Perhaps something will turn up in the literary way. We heard at the Museum yesterday that there was work got by some of the ladies there, and people are all come back to town.'

'Yes ; and your translations are known to be so correct, Miss Stidolph. Oh ! I am sure you will get some work now. And you have got well through the dead season, haven't you ?'

When Miss Beatrice left her, the gaunt hard-featured lady lay back in her chair with something like a smile upon her face. Consolation often takes the form of subtle and crafty flattery. Miss Beatrice knew that if there was one subject which more than another afforded gratification to Miss Stidolph, it was the excellence of her translations. Other translators made blunders in grammar and mistakes in idiom. Miss Stidolph was always correct.

Then Miss Beatrice went to a girl who lay upon the sofa, stretched supine, careless of what went on around her, sick to death of monotonous labour and a dull and dreary life. She bent over her and patted her cheek, and whispered things soothing and soft to her, and kissed her forehead, so that the girl sat up and smoothed her hair, and moved away to the table, where she took up a book and began to read. And all the time Miss Augusta, with sympathetic emphasis, played her Mendelssohn.

What with the music and the gentle words, the girls began to throw off their tiredness and to brighten up, and some of them even went so far as to talk *chiffons*, which is a sure and certain sign of recovery.

Lastly, this daughter of consolation came to Katie and the girl who sat beside her holding her hand.

'Lily, my dear,' she said to the latter, 'have you heard of anything?'

Lily shook her head.

'I have heard of a great many things,' she said drearily, 'and I have been tramping about after them. To-day it was a photographer's. He wanted a girl to sell his things, and he offered fifteen shillings a week—which wasn't so bad. But the man! . . . ' she shuddered. 'There was degradation even in talking to such a man. Then there was a man who wanted a girl to search newspapers for something in the Museum: but that place was snapped up long before I had time to apply for it. Work is like the Pool, you know, that could only cure one person at a time.'

'Patience, dear.'

'I had no money for omnibuses, so I had to walk all the way. Yes, Miss Beatrice, I am already as patient as the most exacting preacher can desire.' She hardly looked it with those eyes that flashed fire at the remembrance of the photographer, and the fingers that pulled the ribbon. 'Patient? Yes. I am as patient as a man in the hands of the Inquisition. I am on the rack, and I smile, you see'—but she did not smile. 'Would you like to hear another day's experience? Yesterday I heard of two places right away in the north of London. One was a place in a school. The lady principal received me frigidly, and heard what I had to say, and told me that if the references were satisfactory I should receive twelve pounds a year for my mornings. Isn't it wonderful? Twelve pounds a year! Four shillings and eightpence a week! Allowing for holidays, five shillings a week!'

'Oh!' said Miss Beatrice. 'It is really terrible.'

'She said that I had left my afternoons and evenings, so that I could easily double my money. I asked her if she thought a woman could live on ten shillings a week, and she replied that she paid according to the market value. Well, then I tried the other place. It was a draper's shop. The man, who is a bully, wants a cashier. She is to work from nine in the morning till half-past eight at night, and is to have seven shillings and sixpence a week. So I left him without saying anything. He is a deacon of his chapel and the chief support of the pastor, I was told. Dives was a draper who paid his cashier seven shillings and sixpence a week.'

'My dear, you are greatly tried. But have patience still. With those who have patience and never lose their hold on faith

and hope, everything comes right in the end. Look at us—my sister and myself—we have been very poor. Oh! we have suffered great privations and many humiliations. When we were young, I think that people were not so considerate and so kind towards their dependents as they have since—some of them—become.'

'Not Dives, the draper of Stoke Newington,' said Lily.

'Often we had not enough to eat. But see what happened. We adopted what we call the simple life: we lived upon fruit and bread chiefly, and sometimes vegetables. So we were enabled to weather the most terrible storms of adversity, and now that we are grown old and glad to rest, Providence has sent us an annuity of fifty pounds, on which we can live in comfort and with thankful hearts. Patience, my dear.'

'It will be such a long time before I get old.' Lily sighed. 'And there are all those storms to get through first. And perhaps the fifty pounds a year won't come along at all when it is most wanted. Very well, Miss Beatrice, I will try to be patient, I will indeed.'

Then Miss Beatrice turned to Katie and kissed her.

'My dear,' she said, 'where there is no news, there is always hope.'

'The natives have brought in reports that they are killed,' Katie replied with dry eyes. 'Nobody thinks there is any room for hope. I went to the office of the paper to-day and saw one of the assistant-editors. He is a kind man, and the tears came into his eyes. But he says it would be cruel to entertain any hope. Tom is dead! Tom is dead!'

Then she sprang to her feet and rushed out of the room.

'Don't follow her, Miss Beatrice,' said Lily. 'She will throw herself on the bed and cry. It will do her good, poor thing. It would do most of us good if we could lie down every evening for an hour or two and have a good cry.'

CHAPTER IV.

A FAITHFUL TRUSTEE.

If, gentle reader, you are proposing to embark on a career of what the harsh world too readily calls crime, and Judges reward with a term of seclusion, would you rather carry it on secretly, or would you take your wife into partnership? It is a question which cannot be lightly answered, because the answer must depend in

great measure on the character and disposition of the lady. For there are wives who, like eminent statesmen when they suddenly and brazenly veer round and give the lie to all that they have hitherto said and taught and professed, are ready to aver that the thing is the only right thing to do, and to cover it up with a gilding of fair words and pretence, so as to make it appear most beautiful, virtuous, and unselfish. Other wives there are, again, who can never be brought to see anything but the naked ugliness of the thing standing out in front of the written law, and refuse any assistance, and go melancholy and ashamed.

You will now hear, if you have the patience to follow up this narrative, what happened to a man who adopted a certain course of action without his wife's knowledge and consent previously obtained. I do not know, that is to say, what Harriet Rolfe would have said, or what co-operation she would have afforded her husband. Perhaps the path which opened out before him, showing such vistas of ease and delight, might have attracted and tempted her as well—but I do not know. Meantime it is a curious speculation to think of the difference it might have made had Harriet herself been a consenting party to the line adopted.

It was not a deep-laid conspiracy, hatched after long meditation and brooding. Not at all: it grew out of small beginnings, and was developed, as such things often are, by the assistance of unforeseen circumstances.

James Rolfe knew perfectly well that he would get nothing from his uncle's will, and was not in the least surprised when he learned its contents. The history of five years spent as an articled clerk in the office, and five more spent in acquiring experience at the cost of his patrimony, caused his uncle to resolve that his nephew should be left to make his own way in the world. This shows what a high opinion he had formed of this nephew. Further, on several occasions he communicated this opinion to James.

Therefore, when Tom proposed that he should prove the will and take over the management of the property, James considered it the greatest piece of luck which had ever befallen him.

At first, he sat down, the papers before him, with all the zeal which one expects of a man paid by the hour instead of by the job, without limit as to time. He began by investigating the circumstances connected with the trust-money, something of which he already knew.

Next, he made, as he thought, the discovery that the whole estate was not more than sufficient to discharge the trust.

He communicated this unpleasant discovery to Tom as a fact about which there was no doubt. It had the immediate effect of causing Tom's departure for Egypt. If it had not been for that discovery the second chapter of this story—nay, the whole story—would have been impossible for a truthful historian.

Now, at school, the youthful James had never been able to add up his sums and to reduce his pounds to pence with the correctness desired by his masters. The immediate result was unpleasant: the more enduring result was hatred and continued ignorance of all mathematical science. Therefore, as an accountant, he blundered. And it was not until Tom was gone that he found out what a big blunder he had made. Never mind: when he returned there would be time to set him right.

Six weeks after his departure there came the first alarming telegram in the papers.

James Rolfe read it and changed colour. Then he reflected and winked hard with both eyes. In moments of mental agitation he always winked hard and tight with both eyes. Some men turn red or pale or both; others fidget with their hands; others wriggle in their chairs; James Rolfe winked with both eyes.

The next day and the next and the day after there came more telegrams of a similar character.

'Harriet,' said her husband solemnly, 'my cousin Tom must be dead. Four days have passed, and he has not come back. The last fugitives who have escaped have returned to camp, but he has not come in. Captain McLaughlin of the 115th and Mr. Addison, correspondent of the *Daily Herald*, are still missing. There is no doubt, I very much fear, that Tom is dead.'

'Then who'll have all the money, James?'

'There may be a will,' he replied, fully aware that there was none. 'It ought to be mine by rights. But there may be a will.'

'What other relations has he?'

'He has cousins by his mother's side, but the family all went to New Zealand long ago. By his father's side I am the only first cousin.'

'Then—oh! Jem, won't you have it all?'

'We must distinguish, Harriet,' he replied in a legal tone, 'we must distinguish. I certainly ought to have it all.'

'He was engaged, you told me.'

'Yes.' James was reminded by the question of certain last words and a promise. And again he winked with both eyes. 'Yes,

he was engaged. I shall look into his papers, Harriet, and find his will, if he left one.'

His heart leaped up within him and his pulse quickened, because he knew very well that there was no will.

The time was one of great tightness. The rent was overdue, and the landlord was pressing. James Rolfe's private resources had well-nigh come to an end. And his practice was meagre indeed. It is not enough, as many have discovered, to call yourself a solicitor, if your language, your manners, your appearance, and your general reputation fail to command the respect and confidence which bring along the client. James's appearance reminded the observer of a swashbuckler in private modern dress. Now, rightly or wrongly, people like their solicitors to exhibit a correct and sober tenue. His tastes led him to racing and therefore to billiards, the turf being somehow the first cousin of the billiard-table. Both are green, to begin with. He was well set up; a big, handsome fellow, with brown hair straight and short, a smooth cheek, and a full moustache; the kind of man who at forty will have developed a figure and put on a double chin. His wife, whom he elevated to that proud position from a stall in Soho Bazaar, was, like himself, big-limbed, full of figure, and comely to look upon. There was no woman anywhere, Jem proudly felt, who could compare with her. In fact, when Harriet was well dressed and in a good temper she was a very handsome creature indeed. She would make a splendid stage queen with her masses of brown hair rolled up under a gleaming gold coronet, a black or crimson velvet dress showing her white arms and setting off her regular features and her ample rosy cheeks, her broad white shoulders and her great blue eyes. Rubens would have painted her with enthusiasm. She must have come from the country, for in London such women are not grown. In other things, besides comeliness, she was a fitting partner for James Rolfe: like him, she ardently loved all the pomps and vanities of the world—every one—and especially the vanity of rich and beautiful raiment. Next, she loved the vanity of the theatre, which she regarded as the proper place to show a good dress. She also loved the vanity of champagne, the festal drink; that of good eating; and that of cheerful society, where the men did what they pleased and the ladies were not stuck-up and stiff.

'Harriet,' said her husband a few days later, 'Tom is really dead. There can be no longer any doubt about it.'

'Is it really and truly certain?'

'Everybody has given him up.'

'Oh, Jem—and all this money! Is it really ours? Oh!'

Jem did not immediately reply, but he shut both eyes hard. Then he walked to the window, and looked out into the back-garden of the villa. Then he returned to the fireplace and played with the things on the mantel-shelf. Harriet waited, and watched him anxiously.

'Harriet,' he said, 'I am his cousin and his solicitor. I have therefore been to his lodgings this afternoon and paid the rent, and carried away his books and papers and clothes and everything.'

'Well?'

'So far as I have gone—I have examined all the papers, which did not take long—I have found no will.'

'Then—oh, Jem,'—Harriet sprang to her feet—'everything is ours!'

'Don't be in a hurry. There may be a will. The property can only be ours if there is no will, because Tom would certainly have given it to that girl.'

Harriet sank back in her chair.

'I thought,' her husband continued, 'before he went away that there would be no money after all.'

'No money? Why? With all your uncle's fortune!'

'Because it seemed at one time as if there were liabilities that would swallow up all. Why should he make a will when he had nothing to leave? There was not even an insurance: there is next to nothing in the bank: there are his books, but what are they worth?'

'No will, you think, Jem? Then——'

'No will, I am nearly sure. But for the present we cannot be absolutely certain.'

'But then, he may not be dead after all.'

'For my own part, I have been certain from the beginning that he is dead. The party were surrounded and attacked. A few escaped. When the place was visited again the other day there were nothing but the skeletons left. I have no doubt at all that he is killed.'

'Oh!' It was a long and rapturous interjection. 'Are you sure, Jem? Oh! And no will! Can no one take the property away from us?'

'There is no will, Harriet. It will be all mine.' He spoke with an authority which commanded faith.

'How much is it, Jem? Oh, tell me how much it is!'

'There's a house in Russell Square, beautifully furnished, where my uncle lived.'

'Oh! but there's more than a house?'

'There is property of all kinds—freehold houses, lands, investments—which come to, we'll say, fifteen hundred a year, I dare say. Harriet, we'll go at once and live in Russell Square.'

'We will, Jem.'

'We'll give up this measly little villa.'

'We will—oh! we will; and Jem—dear Jem—promise me you won't play ducks and drakes with this money as you did with your own.'

'No, my dear, I will not. I've done with betting, don't you fear. It's all over, Harriet. And I say, old girl, we've had our little tiffs about the money, and I own we have been hard up once or twice.'

'Once or twice only? It seems to me that it's been nothing but a stand-up fight ever since we got married. Hardly a day but I wished myself back at my stall in Soho Bazaar. Once or twice? And you led me to believe that you were so well off.'

'Well, Harriet, I was in love, you know. But that's all over, and what I wanted to say was that it's all to be forgotten now, just as we shall sink the stall when we go into Society and take our proper place.'

'Poor Tom Addison!' she sighed. 'I shall put on mourning for six months—not crape, of course, because I hate it—but half-mourning for six months. Half-mourning is always becoming. Poor Tom Addison! And I shall always be sorry that I never saw him. I could have grieved for him so much more truly if I had ever known him.'

'Oh! never mind that,' said her husband brutally. 'Sit down and enjoy a good cry over him, just as if you had known him. You'd like him back again, wouldn't you? Nothing we should either of us like better.'

'Don't, Jem. Of course it makes a wonderful difference to us. But we may have our feelings, and there's a proper way of talking about things.'

'Feel away,' Jem grinned, 'and talk as much as you like, but don't talk him back again. Yes, you can talk, I know, as well as the tinker who talked off the donkey's hind leg.'

'Then there is that poor dear girl who was engaged to him. What's become of her? I wish I'd known her too. I could have called upon her and condoled with her—in black silk.'

'She is a governess somewhere, I believe. It's rough on her, isn't it? I hope she'll get another lover.'

'Lovers are not to be had for the asking, Jem. There's not enough to go round, as everybody knows, and very few girls get more than one chance ; unless, of course, they are more than commonly attractive.' She smiled, feeling herself to be one of the exceptions.

This conversation makes the residence of Mr. and Mrs. James Rolfe in Russell Square intelligible. It also explains why Mr. James Rolfe sat every day in his uncle's office in New Square, Lincoln's Inn, his own name being put up instead of his uncle's, and there carried on his business.

When James Rolfe was an articled clerk there came to the office once a quarter, to receive on each occasion the sum of seventy-five pounds, in five-pound notes, a gentleman named Captain Willoughby. He was an elderly man of distinguished appearance and excellent manners. The senior clerk received him, gave him his money and took his receipt. The whole business did not take more than five minutes. On the last quarter-day of March, commonly called Lady-day, Captain Willoughby had not called for his money.

James was in no hurry to find out what had become of this man and who were his heirs. Indeed, he was at first fully occupied in mastering the details of a complicated estate, and it must be owned that he was not good at mastering details. Presently, things becoming a little clearer, he began to inquire further into this matter, and he discovered several curious and interesting things ; namely, first, that no message or intelligence had come to the office concerning Captain Willoughby ; secondly, that no person had sent in any claim as heir ; thirdly, that no one had inquired after the Trust ; and fourthly, that Captain Willoughby's address was unknown. It was strange that if the man was dead his heirs did not come forward. The mystery of this Trust began to worry him. Where were Captain Willoughby's heirs ? Was he really dead ? If so, why had no news been sent to the office ?

'The trust-money,' he said, presenting the case to himself, 'was given to my uncle. Here is Miss Willoughby's letter in the safe : "Give my nephew three hundred a year, and let the rest accumulate for his children if he marries." And here is the deed which my uncle drew up to secure the carrying out of the Trust. The nephew did marry : there's my uncle's note at the back of the letter. He married an actress and she died. Had he any children? I don't know. If he had, let them come and take their money. They must know where their father came for his. If there are no children, the money reverts to Miss Willoughby's heirs. Well, let

them come and claim it. There is nothing to prove the Trust but this one letter and the deed. They may have a copy, but it isn't likely, or I should have heard of it by this time. Besides, Miss Willoughby died seven years ago; her will has long since been proved and her money paid over by my uncle, her executor, to her heirs, and not a word said about the Trust in her will.'

You now begin to understand what it was that James Rolfe did. First, he constituted himself sole heir. If anything, he said, should be left after the Trust was paid, it could be divided among all the cousins if they came to claim it. Until they should claim their share he would continue to take and enjoy the whole.

Next, he said nothing to his wife about the Trust: he did not endeavour to find out if Captain Willoughby left any children, nor did he acquaint the heirs of Miss Willoughby with the facts.

As for his promise as regards Katharine, he put that away in a corner of his brain where it was not likely to disturb him. And he told his wife nothing of that promise, any more than of the trust-money.

Conscience sometimes makes dreadful ghosts to appear in the dead of night and whisper terrifying things in the ears of some solicitors who do these things. In James Rolfe's case there were no ghosts at all. Conscience acquiesced. He slept beside his handsome Harriet the sleep of the just and righteous. No one knew about the Trust: there was, to be sure, the letter in the safe with the deed, but the key of this safe was in his pocket. No one knew about the Trust or about his promise as regards Katharine—ridiculous, to think that he was going to give that girl his uncle's estate! No one knew except Tom Addison and himself; and Tom was dead.

If he had told Harriet the exact truth, she might perhaps have insisted on the restitution of the trust-money to Miss Willoughby's heirs, and she might have proposed a compromise as regards Katharine. On the other hand, she might have acquiesced in her husband's proceedings and even given him assistance and a moral support. Who knows? But he did not tell her, and she continued happy in her great house, for the first time in her life free from worry; now her husband was rich there would be no more trouble. Of course he was honest. Honest? The doubt could not arise. A gentleman is always honest—who ever heard of a gentleman being a rogue and a robber of orphans?

CHAPTER V.

KATIE.

TOM was dead. The worst misfortune that could happen to any girl had fallen upon Katie. She had lost her lover. In modern warfare the War Correspondent runs more risks than the warrior. The latter only takes his turn in the fighting : the former must be always in the front : the combatants are looked after and kept in safety : they are like the pawns of a chess-board, moved from cover to cover : the correspondent has to find his own cover. The earlier War Correspondent had to keep in the rear with the camp followers and the commissariat : he picked up what information he could gather, an object of much suspicion and some contempt. He now marches with the van, goes out with the forlorn hope, sits down in the thick of the fight with his note-book, and takes ten men's share of the bullets. Consequently he sometimes gets picked off.

The hope that the two missing Englishmen might return was never strong, and grew daily more faint, until it finally vanished quite. They were dead. There could be no longer any doubt. From the great gray desert there came no more news or message from the dead than comes across the broad silent ocean from the shipwrecked sailor whose craft has gone down beneath his feet. Even the men of the Savage Club, a truly hopeful and remarkably cheerful body, among whom are many War Correspondents, men of peril and daring, gave up pretending to hope any longer—Tom Addison, one of the best of good fellows, was dead.

It is good, if you come to think of it, even at the first amazement and stupefaction of grief, to be obliged to go on working as if nothing had happened at all. The old commonplace about the clown who has to tumble and grin while his wife lies sick unto death, may just as well be put away and done with ; first, because clowns are not, as a rule, I believe, so sensitive a folk as to suffer their emotions to hinder necessary work ; and secondly, because the business of making other people laugh by horse-play is in itself serious, not mirthful, and therefore compatible with the saddest heart ; and thirdly, because, if the clown was of a more than commonly feeling disposition, and if his business really required a mirthful heart, it would be good for him to be taken out of himself and his grief for awhile. Katie had a much more difficult duty than that of any clown : she had to go governessing. You must

not look glum before children : you must not cry in their presence : you must not suffer your face to relax into gloom for a moment : yet your smile must not be fixed as of cast-iron : you must laugh with them, play with them, chat with them, and pretend so well as not to be found out or even suspected. All the time that you are with children you must put any private sorrows of your own away and out of sight.

The governess who knows nothing and is only amiable and kind to the children, with a leaning in the direction of religion, is rapidly dying out : the march of civilization tramples upon her. The High Schools and the Cambridge colleges are making her existence impossible. Therefore Katie was happy in having obtained a post as governess in the simple and unpretending family of the Emptages.

They lived in Doughty Street, where they occupied the lower part of the house—that part which commands the kitchen. There were six children, all girls ; the youngest was six and the eldest fifteen, and they were all Katie's pupils. The bread-winner was a clerk in the City : he had, I do really believe, all the virtues of his profession : not one or two, but all : they are too many to enumerate : suffice it to say, that he wrote like copper-plate and kept books with accuracy ; was as punctual as the clock ; never wanted any amusement ; did not smoke tobacco ; drank a half-pint of beer with his dinner and another with his supper ; walked into the City and out again—he had walked in and out for thirty years, being now five-and-forty ; and his salary now reached the very handsome figure of three hundred, at which point it would remain. His father was a clerk before him : his brothers and uncles and cousins and nephews were clerks : his wife was the daughter of a clerk : he was steeped in clerkery. In appearance he was neat, clean, small and spare, with a modest whisker of black hair : he had ventured to become as bald in front as if he were a partner : he believed that he had attained to a really lofty elevation on the social ladder—certainly, there were fewer above than below him : and he considered his career a remarkable example of what may be effected by ability backed by industry and honesty.

His wife was small and neat like him, but she looked much more worn, because to keep six children neat and respectable is work of an even more responsible character than that of a clerk in a City house. I suppose there was nowhere a harder-worked woman, and, fortunately for her governess, there was nowhere a kinder-hearted woman.

Katie began her duties at nine, and she left the house at seven, eight, or nine in the evening, for there was no limit as to hours. She received, in payment for her services, her dinner—it really is a shame that the same word has to do duty for all the various functions of eating which take place between noon and night—and her tea. In addition, she was paid quarterly the sum of twenty pounds a year. This is rather more than a shilling a day—in fact, seven shillings and eightpence farthing a week. It is a great deal of money for a clerk on three hundred a year to pay a governess, but then it released his wife and saved a nurse, and allowed the girls to be fitted for those occupations which are open to genteel young persons for whom the Board School could not be thought of—and at any genteel Ladies' Seminary the education of all the six would cost a good deal more than twenty pounds a year. Katie's pay, to look at her side of the bargain after paying for her bed and breakfast, left her a little over two shillings a week for dress, gloves, boots, books, omnibuses, and amusements, and everything. A noble margin! Yet until the news came from Egypt she was perfectly happy. What matter for a few weeks of pinching when her lover would come home again and take her out of it? She gave herself up therefore cheerfully to the children, teaching them all the morning, walking with them, amusing them, making and mending and darning with them and for them, bearing a hand in laying the cloth, and, in short, behaving as the mother's help rather than the lady governess, in-so-much that she was become the sister of the children and the daughter of the mother, who held out her arms to her in her trouble—they were thin arms, worn to the bone with work for her children—and kissed her and wept over and with her whenever they could both spare five minutes from their work. It is a good thing, I repeat, for the mourner to get up, brush out the ashes from his hair, sew up the rent garments—Katie's two shillings a week allowed of no rending—and go to work again, though the clay-clods upon the dead man's grave are still wet, and though his voice yet lingers in the brain, and though he is still expected to lift the latch and take his accustomed seat.

Katie went on with her teaching. In losing her lover she lost everything. His death—though this she understood not, mercifully—condemned her to a life-long struggle for daily bread. These life sentences are always being passed, and generally upon the innocent. The father makes an Ass of himself, or Fate cuts him off prematurely. The sentence of the Court is that the girls shall be sent into penal servitude for life as under-paid, half-fed,

incompetent teachers, wretched artists, miserable literary hacks, and so forth. Happily the decrees of the Court are not published. If the girls were to understand what lies before them—the loveless, hopeless, dependent, and starved life—one knows not whither they would turn in the misery of the prospect before them. The twenties, when one is hopeful, pass into the thirties when one is strong still, and the thirties into the forties when the strength of youth has changed into endurance; and presently age falls upon them and it grows daily more difficult to find work, and in the end they come to understand their own history and the hopelessness of their case all along and the severity of the Law. Poor ladies! who can help them? Who can take them out of Harley House?

CHAPTER VI.

DITTMER BOCK.

THERE is not much society for families such as this of Doughty Square: friends and relations of course there are; but there is little hospitality, and one cannot expect much visiting when the ladies of the household are occupied all day long in keeping the family neat and respectable to outward show. The theatre, with an order to the Upper Circle, is the most desired form of female recreation. Nevertheless, the Emptages had one regular and even constant visitor. He came every evening and smoked a cigar—of Hamburg manufacture—and conversed with Mr. Emptage and the ladies. He came at first with the view of improving his English by conversation, but, it must be confessed, he now came chiefly for the purpose of conversing with Katie.

He was a young German, named Dittmer Bock. He conducted correspondence for the House which also employed Mr. Emptage, in many foreign languages: he wrote letters and took down instructions in shorthand: he drew forty pounds a year: he lived upon that salary; and he presented the appearance of one who lived upon four times that salary. The young Germans who come to London in the day of small things practise the small economies: they share bedrooms: they know where to go for meals of a satisfying kind, large in bulk to satisfy the Teutonic hunger, but cheap. Eighteen-pence a day is considered, by some of the younger adventurers, as an ample allowance for food: for everything not absolutely necessary, a German who means to rise must wait. Dittmer was a sturdy, well-set-up young fellow, actually without

spectacles. He had the blue eyes and the fair hair of his country: his manners were gentle: he firmly believed in the enormous superiority of Germans over the rest of mankind. He loved dancing, though he got none; he could sing, playing his own accompaniments, the folk-songs of which the good German never tires: he sang them with great feeling: and in the evening when the largest lamp was lit—the gas-lamp—and the children, with Mrs. Emptage and Katie, sat at the table sewing, and Mr. Emptage sat by the fireside, his legs crossed, with an evening paper, enjoying the leisure of a gentleman who has put away care for the day, it was pretty to see Dittmer spreading his fingers over the keys and to listen while he warbled, one after the other, the ditties of the Fatherland.

It became the custom with the young man, when Katie stayed until nine—no one could stay later, because that was the time for the family supper—to walk home with her as far as the door of Harley House.

English young men as well as Germans ardently desire to tell about themselves, their prospects, their aims and their ambitions, but they stifle the yearning. They talk to each other for awhile, but not after their career is actually begun. A German young man, on the other hand, looks about for a companion of the opposite sex, to whom he may confide everything: she becomes his friend, his adviser, his sympathizer. Sometimes she is young and pretty, when the result is inevitable: sometimes she is young and plain, when the result is generally much the same: sometimes she is middle-aged or old, when the friendship may become a very sweet and tender one. How much good might be done, if ladies of a certain age would let it be known that they were ready to undertake the part of consoler, adviser, and sympathizer each to one young man! One feels, speaking as a man, perfectly ready at any age to do as much for a young lady. Katie played this part to the young German, while he talked about himself.

'I am not, Fraülein,' Dittmer Bock explained, 'hochgeborne. My father conducts a Delikatessen-Handlung in Hamburg, opposite the Jacobi Church.' May one disguise the good Dittmer's English? Anyone may speak it as he spoke it. In fact, the German-English of to-day is as easy to write as the French-English of sixty years ago—witness the humourist in every American paper. 'My father had ambitions for his sons above the Delikatessen-Handlung. He wished that they should become great merchants, such as used to be found in London.'

'Are they not found here still?'

Dittmer shrugged his shoulders. 'I find the memory of great English merchants, and I find great German houses—Hamburg is the place where you must look now for great merchants. Did you ever hear of the Godefroi brothers?'

Katie never had.

'They were boys who worked and looked about them. Perhaps they had read history, and knew about Whittington and Gresham. And they rose and became rich; they discovered an island, and they established trade with it and planted it. They became rich. They founded the great German Colonial Empire of the future'—here Dittmer spread his arms—'which will grow and grow until it swallows up your English Colonies one after the other. I, too, shall look about the world until I discover another island like Samoa. Then I shall go there and begin to trade and to plant.'

'It is a great ambition, Dittmer.'

'It has been my resolve since I was a child. In order to carry it out I have learnt what I could—mathematics, languages, book-keeping, shorthand, physical geography, commercial and political history, and the present condition of trade over all the world. I know every harbour and its exports and imports and the principal merchants who carry on its trade.'

'That seems a great deal to learn.'

'Modern trade wants all this knowledge. There will very soon be no more English merchants, because your young men will not learn the new conditions of trade. In every office there must be clerks who can write and speak foreign languages. Your young men will not learn them, and your schools cannot teach them. Then we come over—we who have learned them. For my part, I can write and read English, Swedish, Danish, French, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, and German. Do you think we shall be content to stay here as clerks? No—no. Do you think that I have come here to sit down with forty pounds a year? We are cheap, we German clerks. You say so. Mein Gott! you will find us dear. We are learning your trade: we find out all your customers and your correspondents: we learn your profits and we undersell you. We do not go away. We remain. And presently, instead of an English House there is a German House in its place, because your young men are so stupid that they will not learn.'

At this point Dittmer Bock was quite carried away and became almost the American newspaper German.

'I study English commerce—I study how it began and why it is

now coming to an end. The English clerk will not learn anything and expect to be paid like an Amstrichter at least. In Deutschland we learn, and we are poor at first. Jawohl! we are poor, but we can wait. It is your high salaries in your army, in your navy, in your Church, in your trade, in your Administration, which ruins Great Britain. Everywhere the German merchant drives out the Englishman and the American; your commerce goes out of your hands; for the moment only it remains in London, thanks to the Germans and the Jews. When we have taken Antwerp, it will all go there—all—and where will be your London then? All—all—shall be Deutsch . . .'

Then he fell into a philosophical vein.

'Let us look around. Already France decays—for want of men: England has begun to decay, for there will soon be no more bauer, no villagers, for soldiers and to make strong and pure the bad blood of the towns. Deutschland alone will spread until it has swallowed Holland, Belgium, Scandinavia, and India, and the English Colonies, and has controlled America. There will be only three nations left in the world—Deutschland, Russia, China. Will there be one grand world kingdom, with Berlin for its world centre? Always we see, in history, commerce which passes from hand to hand: everywhere one people which decays and one people which advances. It is curious; it is wonderful.'

'But all this will be after your time, Dittmer.'

'As for me,' he answered, coming down from the prophetic level, 'I shall become another Godefroi, and find another Samoa.'

'I hope you will, Dittmer,' said Katie.

'Fraülein'—he left off talking about himself—'my heart is sorrowful for you. Every day I tear open the paper and I look for news. I say, Oh! perhaps to-day it comes—the telegram that he is well.'

'Dittmer, please stop. Please—do not say such a thing again.'

'But there is hope, since they have learned nothing about him.'

'How can there be hope? No—he is dead. I have his letters. I shall carry them all my life.' Involuntarily she laid her hand upon the pocket where they were kept. 'The letters are all I have of him. He is dead, Dittmer. And, oh! my heart is breaking. Never speak again of news. There can be none, unless they find his bones upon the sands. No news—no news. He is dead—he is dead.'

They finished their walk in silence. When they reached Harley House, Katie saw that the tears were running down Dittmer's cheeks.

'You are good and kind, my friend,' she said. 'Oh! it is something to have a friend in the world.'

He stooped and kissed her hand.

'Fraülein,'—he began, but he choked and said no more.

It is remarkable that although we boast ourselves to be the grand articulately-speaking race of Man, the most expressive things are those which are omitted. Dittmer Bock never finished that sentence, yet Katie knew what he meant, and that she had a servant as well as a friend.

One evening he had been silent and dull at the house, even refusing to sing. He spoke to her on another subject.

'Fraülein,' he said, 'there will be more trouble.'

'What is it, Dittmer? Trouble for you or for me?'

'For our friends. Therefore, for you as well as for me.'

'What is it, then?'

He proceeded to tell her, with many excuses and apologies to himself for betraying the confidence of the House, that in his position of confidential secretary and letter-writer, he knew a great deal more than the clerks in the outer office knew; that the partners spoke more freely in his presence than before others: that in this way, and by putting things together, he had learned that, owing to the depression of trade and the bad prospects of the future, it was in contemplation to make a considerable reduction in the expenses of the establishment.

'What does that mean?

'It may mean that Mr. Emptage will be sent away.'

'Oh! that would be terrible for them.'

'Or perhaps his salary would be reduced.'

'But they are poor enough as it is.'

'I shall be kept because I am cheap. They think I am cheap. Ho! The English clerks are sent away because they are dear, and because they know neither shorthand nor any foreign language, and never try to devise any way of extending the business. They are machines. What did I tell you, Fraülein? Is not London decaying when her young men will not learn the only things which will keep them from falling?'

'But what—oh! Dittmer, my friend—what will that poor woman with her six children do if her husband is dismissed?'

'I know not. Presently another German House may rise upon the ruins of an English House. The good Emptage is honest. He shall count the money in that House. And his daughters shall marry the planters in my Pacific Island.'

CHAPTER VII.

THE LOST PLACE.

No prophecies ever come true except prophecies of disaster. Perhaps the reason is that there have never been any other kind. Katie went about her duties with a sense of impending disaster due to Dittmer's prophecies. The children carried on in their usual fashion: the mother worked and contrived; the precise bald-headed father came home every day and read the paper slowly, with his legs crossed, just as usual: and yet something dreadful was going to happen to them. If you knew that the day after to-morrow there was going to be an earthquake on so vast and extended a character that there would be no time to escape, would you warn the unthinking folk or would you leave them to their fate? If you warned them, for every one who would betake him to his knees, a dozen would take to drink. Better leave them, unconscious, until the end came. As well warn the skipping lamb that in a day or two he will be hanging up with his wool gone and his inside scooped out, in a butcher's shop.

The blow fell a few days later.

It was on Saturday afternoon, when Mr. Emptage generally came home at half-past two and spent the rest of the day with the family, not disdaining to turn his hand to household jobs: few family men, indeed, were readier at nailing up a blind, mending a door-handle, or any of those little matters for which the plumber is too often called in. He generally came home cheerful and contented—tenuity of income is not felt if you desire no more than you have. This day, however, he returned in a condition which—unjustly, I declare—forced those who saw him to think of strong drink.

'John!' said his wife sharply. 'What is the matter? Where have you been?'

His face was white, his lips were tremulous, his hand dangled at his side—a most undignified thing for hands to do—and he swayed from side to side.

'John!' his wife repeated. 'What's the matter?'

'He is ill, Mrs. Emptage,' said Katie. But she knew what had happened.

'Children!' the poor man groaned, 'wife! Katie'—he sunk into an armchair and buried his face in his hands—'we are ruined!'

Had he, then, been dismissed?

'John! What is it? Tell me, quick. What? John! Speak up!'

'Maria, I will. Give me time. I've eaten no dinner to-day at all. What right had I to be eating dinner with the poor children never going perhaps to have any more?' He uttered these awful words with his face still in his hands, so that they had a muffled funereal sound like the drums at the burial of a soldier.

'Oh, John! Speak up!' his wife repeated.

The younger children began to cry. The elders watched their mother and Katie. It would not be becoming in them to begin the crying until they set the example. But they were terrified. John sat up and looked slowly and solemnly around, shaking his head. His children were about him, his wife was at his side, and in front of him was the governess. Oh, how few of his contemporaries had governesses! And now he felt . . . In moments of great trouble it is the small thing which seizes first on the mind. John Emptage suffered less pain at the moment for the loss of his income than for the loss of his gentility. 'Our governess! My children's governess!' Now he would be able to say these words no more.

'Business,' he began with a groan, 'has been terribly bad. It is bad with everybody, but in our trade it seems to have gone altogether.'

'Well, my dear, you have said that so often.'

'At last, the partners have reduced the Establishment. Reduced—Reduced—the Establishment, Maria.'

'John!' shrieked his wife, 'you haven't lost your berth?'

'They've sent away half the clerks—three are gone; and they've cut down the salaries of those who stay on. I'm cut down. Maria—children—your father has been cut down!'

'Oh, John! How much? Fifty pounds?'

'The chief partner sent for me. He spoke very kindly. He said it was very hard on an old servant, but what was he to do? He said that all his personal expenses had been cut down to the lowest, and the establishment in the City kept up in hope of better times, but the trade seemed gone away for good, and what was he to do? And then he said that he was very sorry indeed, very sorry for me he was, but he could no longer go on paying salaries on the same scale, and he was obliged to offer me a reduction of'—John doubled up and groaned as one who has an internal pain—'of half my screw—take it or leave it—take it or leave it. That's all, Maria—take it or leave it.'

'Oh, John! Only half—that is what we married on, sixteen

years ago. It was plenty then. But now . . . ' she looked round her. Six children! And the eldest only fifteen! She groaned aloud.

Three hundred pounds a year does not seem to some people a great income: but many families have to make three hundred pounds suffice for all their wants and all their luxuries: think of the clergy, half-pay officers, and widows. In careful hands—nowhere are the hands more careful than those of the London clerk's wife—three hundred pounds will go a very long way, particularly when you can get such a governess as Katie—a chance which falls to few. But divide the three hundred by two—Mrs. Emptage rapidly made that division and gazed before her in consternation; some clerks certainly have to do with a hundred and fifty, even clerks with families of six. But none knew better than this cousin of a thousand clerks what the income meant.

'Oh! children,' she cried, 'what shall we do? The things that we must give up! How in the world shall I keep you respectable?'

Then she looked guiltily at Katie.

'You will not be able to keep me any longer,' said Katie. 'Oh! I am so sorry for you—I am, indeed.'

'My dear.' Mrs. Emptage embraced and kissed her, weeping. 'And you in all your trouble too—oh! you, of all the world, to be sent away!'

And then the children lifted up their voices together, from Maria of fifteen to Elfie of six, and wept to think that Katie must go. And the poor clerk who had been so respectable and risen to such a height turned his face away and bewailed his fortune.

'Yes, I must go,' said Katie. 'Of course I understand that. Don't mind me, Mrs. Emptage. Maria is able to teach the children—or Agnes, at a pinch, when Maria takes a situation. Let us sit down and talk over what can be done.'

'Take it or leave it,' the clerk continued. 'That is what it came to after all the fine words. And yet he can't help himself. And clerks at a hundred a year can be picked up like blackberries. That's the sting of it. If you don't take it, another will do the work as well.'

'No, John,' said his wife, 'not as well. I have lived among clerks all my life, and for handwriting, punctuality, and trustworthiness, there is no one in all London like you.'

'Thank you, Maria.' Oh, Woman the Consoler! 'Perhaps there are not so many who can pretend to be a better clerk than your husband. But, my dear, Employers will put up with an in-

ferior article if it's cheaper. I've heard a good deal of the clerks out of place, and now it comes home to me. There's thousands of them walking about the City going from office to office—ah! men with good character, besides the profligate and the idle—they say they are slowly starving to death from insufficient food. And how their wives and children live, if they've got any, God in Heaven only knows! It was take it or leave it. My dear, could I leave it with the thought of those poor creatures in my mind? Thousands there are, begging for anything, anything—and they can't get it. Take it or leave it! Why, there didn't want a minute's thought. "I'll take it, sir," I said, "though it's hard at my age—but perhaps when times get better——" "I will, Emptage," he says. "If times improve, I will." So, my dear, there's a promise.'

'Ah! I thought there would be something, John. A promise. Times will get better!'

John shook his head.

'No. Times will get worse, I'm afraid, for English clerks. For now they all want shorthand and foreign languages. And the German clerks are coming over by hundreds to take the places that our poor fellows ought to have. Look at young Bock, with his shorthand and all his languages—and his forty pounds a year! What chance have we against such competition as that?'

'Patience, John,' said his wife. 'Leave off crying, children. Katie, my dear, have one more meal with us, if it is only a cup of tea. Children, Katie will come and see us sometimes—won't you, my dear?'

When Katie came away at nine, she met Dittmer Bock smoking a Hamburg cigar under the lamp-post.

'They know all now,' he said. 'I was afraid to komm. I am sorry for them. Yet they have still one hundred and fifty pounds. In Hamburg that is a good pay for a clerk. One hundred and fifty pounds. Three thousand marks. Count it in marks. So is it twenty times as great—ten marks a day—what cannot be done with ten marks a day? They have been too rich, the English. But they will be rich no longer. The English clerks are sent away. The German clerk remains. I have but forty pounds a year. Eight hundred marks. Yes, the German remains and the Englishman is sent away. It is the new conquest of England. The German remains.'

'I fear they will have to deny themselves in many things,' said Katie.

'They will eat enough—but they will no longer be rich. They will no longer have such a Fraülein to teach the children.'

'No. I must find another place.'

'It is sometimes hard to find—I fear—the other place.'

'I shall find it, somehow. Oh, I have no fear.'

'Fräulein,'—Dittmer turned pale, smitten with a sudden terror—'you leave this good family: you go away. Himmel! Where can I go to meet you now?'

Katharine hesitated.

'Do you still wish to meet me, Dittmer?' she asked, without the least coquetry.

'Ach! You ask if I still wish—what other pleasure have I than to meet you, Fräulein? There is no one else in the world who listens when I speak.'

'If it is only to tell me what is in your mind, I will try to arrange for seeing you sometimes. But——'

'Fräulein, it is sweet to open my soul to you, because you understand and are kind. You do not laugh. Ja! It fills my heart with joy to be with you and to see your face—so wunderschön——'

'Dittmer, you must not——'

'You ask if I still wish to meet you. Ach! And all the day, at my work, I see your beautiful eyes and hear your voice—so soft and sweet——'

'Dittmer,'—Katie laid her hand on his arm—'understand. I can never meet you again—unless you promise not to talk like that. Oh! Dittmer—I have his letters close against my heart—and—and—Dittmer, how *can* you talk to me like that?'

He made no reply, because the thing he would have wished to say was exactly the most calculated to prejudice him still further. He would have said, 'Forget that man, Katie. He is dead and can feel no more. Think that you are young and beautiful, and made for love, and listen to the wooing of a gallant young clerk who means to become a great merchant and to have an island all his own in the Pacific.'

'Good-bye, Herr Bock,' said Katie. 'We will part here.'

Then he pulled himself together, as in the presence of a great danger.

'Forgive me, Fräulein. I will be your brother and you shall be my sister. I will call you Kätchen, I will tell you all that is in my mind. Kätchen, will you consent?' He offered her his hand. She took it without hesitation.

'Dittmer,' she said, 'you shall be my brother as long as you please.'

'And when I am rich and have found my island, you shall be

the queen of the island if you like. If not you shall stay at home and be rich—with your brother. You shall have a robe of velvet and of silk—instead of stuff . . .'

She smiled sadly.

'Dittmer, it must always be a black robe, whether it is of silk or of stuff.'

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CHRONICLE OF WASTED TIME.

In this way did Katie lose her situation and join the ranks of the multitude of ladies unemployed.

It is a great and a doleful multitude ; nowhere can be seen such an array of rueful visages as where this crowd is assembled. It grows daily greater and more doleful, for reasons too various and too numerous to relate. It consists of all those women who, having been gently bred, and for the most part without expectation of labour, and therefore with no special training and no apprenticeship, find themselves, perhaps without the least warning, compelled to work for their living.

The army contains women of all ages, but mostly they are young —perhaps they are gifted with perpetual youth, which, being loveless, must be a mockery. Perhaps, in the great battles which they are always fighting against the allied troops of Poverty and Hunger, the elder ones get quickly killed. These ladies are the Amazons who offer themselves as recruits in the Army of Labour, but, being undrilled and without discipline, are either refused altogether or are else only taken on as auxiliaries, liable to be discharged at a moment's warning. They may also be described as a Fringe hanging round every one of the Professions and Trades in which women may work. They give the most dreadful trouble to everyone actually trained, skilled, and employed, for many reasons—but chiefly because they are all incompetent, every one : if they were not incompetent they would speedily leave these dismal ranks. Therefore, whatever they try, which is everything, they do badly : and thus they lower the standard of good work : and because they are so miserably poor they have to take any pay ; and so they lower wages, which is the beginning of all sorrows.

It is a truly dreadful thing to belong to the Ladies Unemployed. The hunt for work is with them exactly like the savage's hunt for food : it begins every morning : there is no respite : and it tends to produce among the ladies much the same effect as among the savages. Not with all women, it is true, but with some.

Miss Beatrice and her sister at Harley House went through the life without losing the womanly virtues. But it makes many girls hard, grasping, and unscrupulous; every one, like the savage, fighting for her own hand, hunting for her own food. It causes the tender-hearted to become pitiless; the unselfish to become selfish; the honest and truthful to practise ways that are tortuous; the necessities of life make them ready to underbid and to undersell each other, and send them by hundreds into the hungry jaws of sharks who live, like the Loathly Worm of old, upon the tender limbs of young maidens.

Two of these girls were talking together in a cubicle of Harley House. One of them stood in the doorway with joined hands, the other sat on the bed. The former had been six months longer among the Ladies Unemployed than the other; and she was therefore wiser than her friend.

'I have averaged eight shillings a week,' she said, 'eight shillings a week. Katie, during the whole time that I have been trying to get work, I have never possessed more than a single sovereign at a time to put between me and starvation. Oh! it is worse than the life of a slave, and there is no way out of it—not any way—except one, of course—and for that we have to wait so long.'

'Courage, Lily,' said the other; 'you will find something presently.'

Lily shook her head impatiently.

'Well,' Katie went on, 'I have fifteen pounds stored up. Think of that! Fifteen pounds! It ought to keep us for more than three months.'

'No, there are boots; you may go in rags if you can hide them, but you must have boots to wear, and they are frightfully dear. Besides, I am not going to be so mean as to take your money, Katie.'

'How rich I thought I was,' said Katie, 'when Tom asked me before he went away if I had plenty of money, and I thought of my hoard of fifteen pounds, and told him that I had no anxiety at all about money, and of course I hadn't so long as I had my situation. And now he is dead,' Katie sighed. 'And my place is lost. Lily, you must and shall share my money.'

'Oh, Katie, you will want it all.'

'My dear,' Katie took her hand and held it, 'we must be sisters, because of all the women in the world I do not think there are any other two so desolate and so friendless as we are.'

'I am sure there are not. I wonder what we have done to deserve it?'

'There cannot, surely, be two other girls in the world left without any friends or relations. Fancy not having a single cousin, to say nothing of father, mother, brother, or sister.'

'My father,' said Lily with a touch of pride, as if the thing showed dignity and independence, 'always said that sooner than return to his relations he would sit down and starve.'

'Mine,' said Katie without any pride at all, 'refused to let me ever speak of my relations. You see, Lily, we must have cousins.'

'And perhaps they are generous cousins who would help us—if we can be helped; but mine at least cannot be rich—I am sure they cannot be rich. When father was ill I forgot to ask him who they are and where they live.'

'My father,' said Katie, carrying on the comparison, 'would have told me, I suppose, where he got his money, but he fell down dead and had no time, poor dear!'

'What *have* we done to deserve it?'

'Lily, it is always what your father does: the responsibility of a man must be terrible; it isn't only the income for his own lifetime, it is the future of his children to the third and fourth generations that he has in his hands. I wonder if they ever think of it? I wonder if our fathers, Lily, ever thought of what would happen to their daughters when they should die.'

'Mine didn't. He thought about his invention, and the man who stole it and made a fortune out of it. He brooded over it all the time.'

'And mine thought about his club. Does it seem quite right that fathers should have such power? If one's father fails, down they all go, children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. If he succeeds, up they all go together, higher and higher.'

'Unless they take to drink,' said Lily wisely.

'If he fails, the girls have to look for work——'

'And not to find it.'

'Unless,' Katie continued, 'they get married. And then there is the chance of another father failing.'

'My dear, what is the use of talking about marriage in Harley House? Love and marriage cannot come in our way. How are we to make the acquaintance of any men? Some of the girls at the Museum make acquaintances with the readers, but no good ever came of that sort of acquaintance, yet.'

'But, Lily, anything may happen.'

'Not out of books, unless it is bad—in real life everything happens that is bad. But as for love and marriage—I declare,

Katie, that if we had our hair cut off, and were shut up in a Spanish convent, a hundred miles from any man, we should have a better chance of marrying than we have here—I mean we two, who have no friends at all. Not the rest of the girls, who have brothers, and can go out with them.'

'I have had my chance, Lily, and I have been robbed of it,' said Katie.

'Yes, whatever happens you will be the happier for having been loved. It is something to remember always. Oh! it must be a wonderful thing to feel that a man is going to give up all his life—all his work—to make you happy, and keep you in ease and comfort. It must be such a happiness just to feel it, as you did, for a month or two, that even to think of it makes me go mad with rage at the cruel fate which keeps us locked up here out of the way of it, so that we can never, never meet with it.'

'Yes,' said Katie, 'it is a wonderful thing to feel. There is no other happiness to compare with it—and I have felt it. Oh!' she clasped her hands, 'I have felt it!'

'Katie, when I am tramping the streets from one place to another, knowing beforehand that I shall be too late, a terrible picture arises before my mind, a dreadful nightmare which comes by day: and I see my future life stretched out before me plain and clear—perhaps yours, dear, as well, but I hope—yes—I hope that God will take you first.'

'Oh, Lily!'

'I must—I cannot help it—I must speak! The picture comes of itself and stays before my eyes, and I must tell somebody. Katie, I see myself going on like this for year after year—all my life.'

The girl's dark eyes glowed and grew larger as she gazed intently upon the panoramic picture which rolled itself out before her. As she spoke it became real to Katie as well.

'Oh! such a long life—I shall live to eighty. There will be no change at all until the time comes when no one will give me any work to do at all. And then I shall go to the workhouse. I am always applying for places. Sometimes I get taken on, but generally I am too late. Always jostling and pushing and fighting with other women. What a life! It is yours as well as mine. What a fortune for us to be born with!'

'Lily, some change will come. It must come!'

'No—never any change. Look at poor old Miss Stidolph. She is sixty, at least: and she is no better off than when she began—

thirty years ago and more, after her father failed—to go out as a daily governess. What change has ever come to her? Look at Miss Augusta and Miss Beatrice: to be sure, they've got fifty pounds a-year to live upon now. Before it came they were starving. And their father was a Canon of a Cathedral. What a life they have led! No, Katie, for us and those like us there is no hope—none. I declare, Katie, that if there were any way of escape—any—offered me, I would take it.'

She looked about her like a prisoner in a cell, and gasped as if for want of air.

'Lily!'

'Never enough money,' she went on; 'never enough food; never enough dress; never any society at all. What a life it is that lies before us! You are twenty-one, and I am twenty-two. Perhaps fifty or sixty years of it. And oh! how slowly the hands move round the clock! Oh! how slowly the sun goes down!'

'Lily, you have no right to assume that things will go on just as they are doing at present.'

'No. They may be worse. Katie, is it right that girls should be treated so? We are born with the same desire for happiness as other girls. We could enjoy, like them, beautiful things and lives of ease. And oh! look at us. There is not a single lady in this great town who invites either of us to her house: there is no chance of meeting a gentleman unless it is the kind of gentleman who speaks to girls in the street. Happiness! What does it mean? We do not know what it means. We are sentenced.'

Katie sighed heavily.

'What good is it to rebel?' she asked. 'Let us accept our lot and make what we can out of it. What can we do more, in the way of work?'

'I should like to do nothing. We were made to do nothing. That is why women are not able to lift anything and to fight. It is the business of men to work and of women to sit down and enjoy the fruits of their labours. Besides, men like work—and women don't.'

'What can we do, however?'

'I can do nothing. I never was taught to do anything. None of us were.'

'Well, but——'

'I can copy, I think, that is all I am really fit for. I can copy documents, and I can go to the Museum and make extracts. I can also search. I don't suppose,' she added with candour, 'that I

should ever find anything, but I could try, if anyone wanted me to find anything. Some girls seem always able to get search-work to do. But then I know nobody, and have got no interest. And oh! how many there are who are trying to get the work!'

'You can teach, Lily.'

'No,' her black eyes, which had been heavy and sad, flashed with anger. 'No—I cannot and will not teach. I *hate* teaching. I loathe teaching. I want to kill the children: they drive me to madness. The last time I tried teaching I ran away from the place, or I should have done something dreadful. Fortunately, I don't know anything. I can't add up and divide. I can't tell you the capital of any country, and I do not remember a single date. And I've forgotten all the Kings of Israel. Katie, I would rather make button-holes for shirts than teach.'

'Well, dear, there are other things.'

'I could do clerk's work, but no one will have me. I could write letters.'

'Let us be hopeful, Lily. You are very pretty, and perhaps—who can tell? As for me, that is all over; but you—Lily, are you sure you have no relations?'

'I know of none. My father came to London from the North. But I don't know where. He brought his invention with him, but somebody stole it from him, and then he became a clerk. He lived a moody and a lonely life, and he made no friends; but he always hoped to make another invention.'

'What was his invention?'

'I don't know. Something to do with machines. My father was always making pictures of wheels. I have no friends and no money. What have I done, I ask again?'

'It isn't what we have done, dear, I told you: it is what our fathers did.'

Lily made as if she would say something really severe, but she refrained.

'Well,' she said mildly, 'to-morrow you will begin the round. I only hope'—she said this as one who has no hope—'that you will be more lucky than I have been.'

Then the other residents began to come upstairs, and Lily retired to her own cubicle, and they all went to bed.

In the night, that Vision of a long and hopeless life of Insufficiency arose before Katie and rolled itself out scene by scene like a never-ending panorama. It was one of those nightmares which do not cease when one awakes, sits up, shakes the pillow, and turns over

on the other side. This kind remains, and the moment you go to sleep again the story is carried on from the point where it was stopped by the waking. There was once a man who had a nightmare of this kind which came every night and carried on the story slowly, hour by hour, minute by minute—so that he lived two lives, one by night and one by day. His tombstone—he died young—says nothing about his nocturnal career: it says he was a good husband, a kind father, and a straight-walking Christian. Ah! and how about the other life? Katie saw herself tramping about in search of work and finding none. She was always hungry: her clothes were always shabby: gloom and despair weighed upon her soul: hopelessness crept over her like a paralysis: she saw her youth and her strength slipping away: she saw the lines in her wasted cheek—which Tom once loved so much and thought so beautiful. Then she saw how she had grown old and was just as poor as ever and work was just as necessary to her, but it was all given to the younger ones. Lastly, she found herself with no money at all. And an awful terror—such a terror as she had never before experienced: as if now, at last, everything was over: as if there were no God in the Heavens; or if there were, that He had turned His face from her for ever: she could not pray: to look forward was more dreadful than to look back: how terrible, how dreadful a thing is old age in poverty and want, and without the stay and consolation of Christian hope! Then in her dream she crept friendless and destitute into the streets. Oh! Tom—Tom! was it for this that you perished upon the Egyptian sands? Then she awoke with a sob. Lo! it was morning, and the sun shone upon the windows—even upon the windows of Harley House.

Would you follow these two girls in their quest of work and bread?

It was a hopeless quest, because the things that they could do were so few and there were already so many girls to do them, and they had no friends or private interest. All that Katie could do well was to undertake the teaching and care of young children, or of those girls with parents to whom the curriculum of the High School does not appeal. She could bring to her task, as she had done with the Emptage children, affection and care such as one hardly has a right to expect for ten times the salary. Alas! she found that for one place there were fifty candidates. And like Lily she was always too late.

In the months of July and August young and old alike dream of green fields, of woods where the shadows are deep and cool, of the sea-shore where the fresh breezes roll up the blue waves into light bracken upon the shingle, of rocks with deep pools and dark cool caves. It is hard in these months to be seeking for work and finding none, while the streets smell like a bakery whose windows have not been opened for weeks, and the reflected heat mounts up and strikes your cheeks as with a hot hammer, and the air of the great town seems used up by the breathing of all the millions, and there is no refreshment by day or night, and one cannot afford fruit and ice, and the only place you have got for the evening is hot and close and filled with depressed and melancholy women. Katie sat there, among the rest, sad and weary, though Miss Beatrice sat beside her and held her hand, whispering words of consolation and patience, and Miss Augusta played solemn music. As for Lily, she came no longer to the drawing-room: she had taken a lowly position as figurante in a melodrama: she went to the theatre every night and stood in the front, being a pretty girl, and received fifteen shillings a week. The work and the place and the surroundings were not exactly what a careful mother would choose for her child: but, careful mothers, reflect that if your child must work, she cannot always choose her work, and her reputation will have to depend upon herself and not upon the safeguards and precautions arranged for her by her friends. It is, indeed, the first condition of woman's work that these safeguards must be abandoned.

Lily was on the boards, but Katie could get nothing to do. She should have remembered that July, August, and September are the worst months in the year for a daily governess looking after work. But she did not: and she thought continually of her dreadful dream and of Lily's picture of the long and miserable life.

A girl who has a profession—even if it be only that of nursery governess—always makes a mistake if she leaves it. Katie made that mistake. She left her profession and went to the Reading Room of the British Museum instead.

Here, besides the men who study and the authors who write and those who hunt into obscure things and clear up doubtful points, sit the girls who go there in search of work. The attendants know them: the Superintendent of the room knows them: they are known to each other. They copy, as Lily had done: they hunt up passages and write them out: they search in old magazines: they find out things for leader-writers, reviewers, authors, members of Parliament, and men who want to write articles of the thoughtful

and practical kind, and have not time to get at the facts: some of them are so clever in the arrangement and orderly display of the facts that the article is well-nigh written when the work leaves their hands: but I never heard that their name appeared at the end of it. Some of them translate from French, German, or Italian; some, the cleverer among them, assist journalists with bits of London letters for Colonial papers, work up Fashion columns, do papers for magazines if they can get them in: and write stories. Yes: unfortunately for the Art of Fiction, the rules of which they have never studied, they write stories.

There is a great deal of work done in the reading-room, but then there are so many to take it and the pay is so little. Katie joined this band. She could not write stories or articles: she had no literary ability at all: she ought never to have entered the Reading Room.

If a girl is so clever as by dint of hard work, clear head, and determination to force herself across the line which separates the amateur from the professional, she will get out of this dreadful land of wailing and of wringing of hands, where the women are for ever filling sieves with water and rolling stones uphill, and trying to drink the water that continually runs away. The girl who has in her the touch of genius which enables her to write, to paint, or to act, or to play, or to administrate, will certainly pass over the line into the region of comfort if not of honour. These girls are the exceptions. Most of them, as we said before, are incompetent. Those who would teach know nothing of the methods of teaching: nor have they passed examinations, nor have they learned anything at all thoroughly as boys learn things: those who would write novels have not the least knowledge or conception of dramatic effect, selection, exaggeration, emphasis, incident, humour, character, or any of the things which make up the art into which they plunge in sheer ignorance that it is an art at all. Those who would be artists can neither paint nor draw, even though they have obtained prizes and medals at the Schools which are kindly manufacturing every year fresh batches of incompetents who would like to be artists. Those who would go on the stage have no histrionic power. Those who would become professional musicians are only girls who can play a little better than the average. Those who would become singers are only fit for the 'little music' of a middle-class drawing-room. Those who would administrate and become clerks, secretaries, managers, housekeepers, matrons, and so forth, have no training in business, no genius for details, no heads for

organization, and no power of authority. What is to be done for them? There is only the lowest work in every branch: that which is most miserably paid: and of that there is not enough to go round.

Alas! Katie was not one of those who are clever. Nature destined her, as she destines all but a very few women, for the home life: she was intended for love: she was meant to be happy with her lover first, and her husband next, and then her children. Nature meant one thing. Fate, who constantly disregards Nature's intentions—indeed they have not been on speaking terms since the days of Adam and Eve—allotted another thing. She was too weak in spirit for the struggling competition of labour: she was not clever enough to excel in any art: she could not fight: she was not sharp enough to see openings, to push and shove, to apply continually, to make herself a burden and a nuisance until she could get what she wanted: she could not be importunate—other girls do this with brazen front though with sinking heart. Katie could not. Therefore she got no work except at rare intervals—and the little store dwindled and shrunk.

Then a great misfortune befell them. Lily fainted on the boards and had to be carried out in the sight of the audience. She was forgiven the first time, but she fainted again. This clearly showed that she had contracted vicious habits, and the manager dismissed her. And on the little store there were now two to be kept.

'My dears,' said Miss Beatrice, 'there was once a widow woman with a single cruse of oil. But the Man of God came and stayed with her, and the cruse wasted not.'

'If there is a Man of God anywhere about,' said Lily irreverently, 'he couldn't do better than stay at Harley House.'

CHAPTER IX.

TOM'S DEAD HAND.

JAMES ROLFE sat in his uncle's room at his uncle's table and in his uncle's own wooden chair. He had succeeded to the business, apparently, as well as the estate. Bundles of papers were laid on the table before him; they were the papers connected with his uncle's estate, now his own. For he had no business of his own, and his uncle's clients, if he had any left, had gone elsewhere. The tin boxes round the room with names painted on them contained the papers of dead clients who would pay no more fees.

The afternoons at the end of September are quiet in New Square, Lincoln's Inn. Save for an occasional footfall on the pavement or on the stairs, there is nothing to disturb the legal intellect engaged upon the toughest job. But in September the legal intellect is chiefly unbent and upon the moors.

In the outer office two elderly clerks, who had worked together for forty years, under Mr. Joseph Addison, now dozed in their chairs. Papers were spread out before them and a pen lay ready to be dipped if anyone called, but they had no work to do. Their new master, in fact, kept them on purely for the sake of appearance. He thought that the presence of these respectable old gentlemen lent dignity to the office and the show of confidential family business. So, doubtless, it would have done, but for the fact that no one ever came to look at them. In the den beside the door the office boy, full of roast beef and mild ale, slumbered, his head upon the desk. It was a blissful time with him, for he had nothing to do, no errands to run, no message to deliver, no bell to answer, and nothing to copy. He could go to sleep every day and all day long, and drew his pay as regularly as in the old master's time. In his own room James Rolfe, who had lunched copiously, with a pint of stout, slept peacefully. The offices of Uncle Joseph, deceased, had become a Castle of Indolence. Outside, the world went on, quite unconscious of the office. Nobody ever looked in. Even the postman passed it by without a letter or a parcel. Everybody was asleep all day long. It was like the Heaven of the solicitor's clerk. Each of us has his own little Heaven of imagination. In that of the solicitor's clerk, every man has an office to which he is bound to go every morning at nine-thirty, there to remain with an interval of an hour for dinner until half-past six or seven. It is a beatific office, because there is no work: nothing to transcribe, copy out, or engross, and everyone of the Elect may sleep all day, chat or tell stories, go out and have a glass of beer and a smoke, and take two hours instead of one for dinner, arrive late, go early, take long holidays, and draw salaries continually increasing without any limit. A holy calm rested upon this office all day. The chief came late and went away at all hours, and as yet had said nothing at all about work or pay. The word 'sack' had not been mentioned. A holy calm indeed! Now in James's former office—a small and humble place compared with this beautiful suite of rooms—a single boy represented the whole clerical staff: there were, to be sure, the usual bundles of papers on the table: but though there was, as in this office, an entire absence of

clients, there was never any quiet or calm in it, but on the contrary the noisy laughter and the jokes of sporting men, Jem Rolfe's friends, resounded in it, and it was charged with an atmosphere of tobacco, beer, worry, and irritation, with duns continually calling and 'wanting to know,' and the postman dropping letters from angry creditors with threats of proceedings, not to speak of the office boy, who was possessed by a devil, and was always doing something to madden his master, and to get his own ears boxed.

Yet five minutes, and this calm was to be rudely dispelled, not to return, so far as concerned the chief, for many a day. In fact, it has never since returned. This afternoon, the holiest and the calmest, was the last day of real peace.

Two girls, about to cause this interruption, were at this moment in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

'I am sure it is the best thing to do, Katie,' said one. 'If this man was really a friend of Tom's, he would at least be able to advise—and you *must* have relations.'

'I do not think he was a friend, although he was a cousin. But Tom told me to go to him if I was in trouble. We can but try, Lily.'

Suddenly—without the least warning, in the most unexpected manner—every one of those sleepers was startled into consciousness.

The office-bell was rung.

Then the chief sat upright, dropped the half-smoked cigarette from his fingers, and seized the papers tied up with red tape which lay on the desk before him. He would be discovered, whoever it was that was come to disturb him, in the act of wrestling with legal intricacies. The two old clerks jumped in their chairs and each man seized a pen and dipped it in the ink, then, with squared shoulders, and heads bent over their work, and pens that flew with the swiftness of the ready writer, they presented the proper appearance of industry and pressure, though I know not what they wrote. The office—it is a well-known rule—must not be discovered doing nothing. The boy at the door, startled out of sleep, lifted his head and threw open the pages of a big folio before him containing I know not what old accounts and entries of bygone business. The impression of zeal and of an overwhelming amount of work having been started, he opened the door.

The bell had been rung by two young ladies, neither of whom

was known to the boy. One of them gave him her card—'Miss Capel.'

James jumped—there is no other way to describe the movement—when he received the card. He had put away his solemn promise and sacred pledge in so remote a corner of his brain that he had almost forgotten the promise and the name of Katharine Capel.

'What the devil,' he murmured, 'does she want?'

But when his visitors came in he turned pale and looked first at the card and then at Lily, and then at Katie, and then at the card again, and then at Katie.

'Miss Capel?' he said, bowing to Lily and again looking at Katie with a kind of bewilderment.

'No—this is Miss Capel.'

'Is—is your name Capel?' he asked. Why should not her name be Capel?

'You do not know me, Mr. Rolfe,' said Katie. 'I am—that is, I was—engaged to your cousin, Tom Addison.'

'You were engaged to my cousin—you?' He kept staring at her face. 'You?' Then he tried to pull himself together. 'Were you? Excuse my surprise, Miss Capel: I had heard of you, but I did not at first catch the name. Yes—certainly—Miss Capel—oh, yes! He always spoke of you by your Christian name.'

'My name is Katharine Regina.'

'Katharine Regina—Regina?' he repeated the second name and still continued to gaze into her face, not rudely, but as one recognises an old acquaintance.

'It is a family name.'

Mr. Rolfe sat down without asking the ladies to take chairs—this they proceeded to do.

But he seemed unable to take his eyes off Katie's face, and he kept winking hard with both eyes at once.

'Katharine Regina! . . .' he repeated. 'It is a most curious name—and Capel. Oh yes, I remember,' he said with an effort. 'Of course, I remember now. It was a most disastrous engagement for you, Miss Capel. Tom told me all about it, of course.'

'I have come to you, Mr. Rolfe,' said Katie, 'because you were Tom's cousin, and he told me how you helped him in the matter of his uncle's will, and that you would help me, too, if I were in trouble.'

James bowed with dignity. He had indeed helped his cousin in the most unselfish manner.

'I am in great trouble now.'

'And anything that I can do, Miss Capel . . .' he began.

Having now recovered somewhat from his first surprise, James observed first that both girls presented the appearance of great poverty; it was legible in their hats, in their jackets, in their gloves, and in their boots.

'Only let me hear the circumstances,' said James after making these observations. Perhaps the recollection of the sacred pledge and solemn promise was beginning to produce some effect upon him.

'I am so unfortunately situated,' Katie explained, 'that I do not know any of my relations. I want you to advise me how I am to find them—I am in very great straits, Mr. Rolfe, and I think if I could find them they might help me.'

'Yes—that ought not to be difficult.'

'My father died suddenly a few months before—before I lost Tom. He never told me anything about my relations at all.'

'Oh! That was unusual. But you would find something to help you among his papers, I should say.'

'He left no papers at all.'

'That is more unusual still.' James kept looking at her in the same inquiring way. 'May I ask what was his profession?'

'He had none. Formerly he was in the army. He lived upon a pension, or an annuity of three hundred pounds a year, which he drew regularly once a quarter. He left no papers behind him and received no letters. On the few occasions when I ventured to speak to him about my relations he forbade any mention of them. I think he had quarrelled with them: the only piece of writing which we were able to find after his death was a scrap of a letter.' She gave it to James, who read it aloud—'in case, therefore, of my not being able to call as usual for the money on Quarter Day, you can send it to me by cheque made payable to order and not crossed, in a registered letter, addressed to Willoughby Capel at the following address'—there the paper was torn and there was no more.

'His name,' said James, 'was Willoughby Capel—Willoughby Capel—and he had an annuity of three hundred pounds a year. Yes.' He laid the scrap of paper upon his desk after looking at the handwriting. 'You are sure that this is your father's own hand?'

'Yes, certainly.'

He went on as if he were putting two and two together.

'Your own name is Katharine Regina and his was Willoughby

Capel: and he had an annuity of three hundred pounds a year. Who paid him that annuity?'

'I do not know. I thought you would, for Tom's sake, help me to find out.'

'Yes,' he replied, shutting both eyes tight, 'I will help you. Oh! yes.'

'Tom begged me in his last letter—his last letter'—she made that little gesture which assured her that the packet of letters was still in her pocket—'that you would help me if I went to you.'

'What was he like—to look at—your father?'

'He had been, and was to the last, a very handsome man. He was tall and had regular features: he was over fifty years of age, but his hair was still unchanged: it was of a light-brown; he wore a small pointed beard and long moustaches. No one who had ever seen him would ever forget him.'

'You are exactly like him,' said James, speaking his thoughts instead of concealing them, as is the part of a wise man.

'Why—have you ever seen him?'

'No—but you have described yourself. Well—you desire, naturally, to find out your relations.'

'Yes. I was a governess, but latterly I have been out of employment, and I have been trying to get work at the Museum. If my relations are rich, they may be able to help me. Except my friend here, there is no one in the world who knows or cares about me. Will you help me, Mr. Rolfe, for the sake of your poor dead cousin, who loved me?'

The tears rose to the girl's eyes: the breaking voice, and the attitude of sorrow and poverty and helplessness, ought to have made this young man spring from his chair and swear that he was ready to fly to the ends of the earth in order to help her. That he did not instantly and eagerly proffer his friendly offices was due to a most horrible suspicion—more than a suspicion—a discovery. The girl's father had received an annual stipend or income of £300: his name, she said, was Willoughby Capel: her description of the man exactly corresponded with the Captain Harry Willoughby who used to come regularly once a quarter to that very office, for that same annual stipend; the donor of that trust-money was Miss Katharine Regina Willoughby. More than that, as if that was not enough, the girl's face was exactly that of Captain Willoughby: the resemblance was startling: it left no room for doubt: everybody could see it who had known the late Captain. As for himself, he remembered Captain Willoughby very well indeed: on her very

first entrance he was struck with the resemblance, and he thought —forgetting Katie's existence—that it was Captain Willoughby's daughter come in person to claim her rights.

She was—she must be—Captain Willoughby's daughter, and she was come, not to claim her rights, but to ask him—him, of all men in the world—to take such steps as would, though this she knew not, lead to the establishment of her rights.

'I will advise,' he said coldly, 'to the best of my ability. We might advertise. Are you disposed to spend money in advertising? It is costly.'

'I have no money to spend in anything.'

'That is unfortunate.'

'If you are disposed to help me,' Katie said timidly, and meeting no response in his eyes, 'will you lend me the money to advertise? I would ask that an answer should be sent to me under my full name, Katharine Regina Capel. That would perhaps meet the eye of some cousin.'

'Advertising costs a great deal of money,' James replied, and with averted eyes. 'You had better let me make a few inquiries first. Will you write down the late address of your father, and the name of his club? Thank you. I will make inquiries, and perhaps we may stumble on something. It is certainly unusual'—he cleared his voice, and shut his eyes half a dozen times in succession —'most unusual, for a man to die without relations of any kind anywhere. Perhaps they are in America or the Colonies, in which case our search might be hopeless. However, I will do my best—yes—my best, believe me, Miss Capel. Leave the matter in my hands, and take no steps yourself. You understand, I am sure, that when you have placed your affairs in the hands of your solicitor, you must not meddle with them yourself at all. Leave the whole matter in my hands.'

He spoke bravely, but his voice somewhat lacked something of sincerity, and he did not lift his eyes.

'Katie,' said Lily, when they were in the street once more, 'there is something wrong about that man. He has done something. He can't look you in the face, and he turned red and pale and all colours at once; and why did he keep winking with both eyes?'

'I believe that Tom and he were not exactly friends. But he said he would make inquiries.'

'He certainly *said* he would, whether he means to or not—but why shouldn't he? He will send in a bill for his services, I sup-

pose. Katie, if I were you I would put in that advertisement as soon as there was money to spare for it.'

But of money, alas! there was none.

When the girls were gone, James sat down with a perturbed countenance, and an unquiet heart. He had no longer any desire to sleep.

Presently he rang the bell, and one of the old clerks answered it.

'I want,' he said, pretending to search among the papers, 'to find the last receipt for an annuity which my uncle used to pay to Captain Harry Willoughby, who appears to have died about six months ago.'

The clerk brought the book with all the receipts.

'This is his signature, is it? Very good. The last, dated January, of the present year. Yes. Do you remember Captain Willoughby?'

'Very well, sir.'

'Where did he live?'

'I do not know. He came here once a quarter and drew his money.'

'Thank you—that will do.'

The signature of the receipt corresponded exactly with the writing of the torn letter. There was now not the least room for doubt. This girl—Tom's *fiancée*—was the heiress of the trust-money. It was his duty—it was his clear and certain duty—to give up the whole of it. It was no longer possible to juggle with words, and to gloss over things; the heiress was found—he had to give up the whole of that trust-money to the girl. What a terrible hole it would make in his income! There was no other way out of it. As for what he had already done, Courts of Justice might take a harsh view of that: but it was honesty itself compared with keeping the property now that he had found the heiress. She must have been led, he thought, to his office by the Dead Hand of Tom himself. James Rolfe was not a superstitious person, but he had read novels, and he knew very well that dead people do constantly visit evildoers with curses, and bring trouble upon them, especially when they have dealt wickedly with wards.

Yet, he thought, being a man of this generation, and therefore little afraid of dead hands, what harm could a dead man's hand do to him, compared with what he would do to himself if he gave up the property? And in what words should he explain to Harriet? And how would that dear creature regard the loss of three-fourths of her income, and a return to the old life?

He put the torn scrap of writing in the safe along with the old letter from Miss Willoughby, the only evidence of the Trust; and then, though it was only half-past three, he took his hat and walked out of the office. He could no longer sit there. When he was gone some of the former rest and calm returned. The visit of the young ladies had brought no work. The two old clerks began to doze again. But the boy, disturbed by the appearance of youth and beauty, and no longer able to sleep, read a penny novelette.

In the evening, James argued out the whole thing with himself over some Scotch whisky and a pipe.

He was no worse off, he assured himself, than he had been before the young lady turned up. He knew, to be sure, who the heiress was: he was not obliged, however, to know: there was nothing formally and legally to connect Miss Capel with the daughter of Captain Willoughby. What did it matter that he himself knew the fact, provided that he kept it to himself? No one could possibly find out that he knew it. But oh! what a difference there would have been if Tom had known it before he went away! He had promised Tom to give her all that was left after the Trust was paid. A ridiculous promise extorted at a moment when his mind was not in the usual judicial balance. Ridiculous, indeed! But no one knew it except Tom. Yet he thought it would be well to keep the promise to a limited extent. He might give her all the money that was in Tom's name in the bank when he went away. How much was it? Thirty pounds or so. He would send—and then he laughed, remembering a most remarkable occurrence. He had quite forgotten to ask the lady her address. Therefore he could not send her anything. Nor could he do anything at all.

It was midnight. He sat in the library, which was perfectly quiet, because it was at the back of the house, and everybody was gone to bed. Suddenly—no man was more free from superstition than James Rolfe—he felt a horrid tremor seize all his limbs, and cold dews stood upon his forehead. It seemed as if Tom himself—his dead cousin Tom—stood beside him, invisible but audible, hurling reproaches at him, calling him 'Cur, Liar, Thief, Blackguard,' and similar ungentlemanly names—taking, in fact, a mean advantage of his ghostliness. He also threatened vengeance in some undefined manner, which made James feel just as uncomfortable as Moab or Ascalon might have felt when it was reported in the Bazaar that a Prophet was predicting woe for its people.

James seized the decanter.

When he went upstairs, some time after, he awoke his wife—

who was sweetly dreaming that she was going to live for ever, always young and always beautiful, with champagne, and silk dresses trimmed with lace, and every night a stall at the Theatre—by banging his shin against the sharp edge of the coalscuttle. This is enough to make the most pious man awake his wife.

'Good gracious, James,' she cried, 'what is the matter? Can't you turn up the gas?'

He replied somewhat thickly, rubbing the injured part:

'It's—it's Tom's Dead Hand, my dear.'

CHAPTER X.

THE LAST SHILLING.

THE two girls sat together on Katie's bed. Spread out in Lily's lap was all the money that was left—twenty-two shillings and sixpence in silver. The little heap meant a fortnight's support.

'Let me reckon up,' said Katie. 'You are so stupid at figures, you poor thing. There's three and sixpence for bed and one and nine for breakfast: that makes five shillings and threepence each.' She set aside ten shillings and sixpence: 'There—that is one week; there is left twelve shillings for the next week.'

'But there must be washing, Katie—and, oh! how *can* we live on a few slices of bread and butter taken in the morning?'

'When the money is all gone, where is the bread and butter to come from, Lily?'

'Where, indeed?'

'It is all my fault, Katie,' Lily burst out. 'I have been eating up your money—oh! I will run away and leave you, at least to have all that is left.'

'Don't Lily. We are all alone; let us keep together, whatever happens. Lily, let us only keep together. Let us say to each other that we are not quite alone in the world.'

'What can we do? Oh! what can we do?'

'I do not know. There are too many of us, Lily. There is not enough work for all, and somehow we do not seem to get even our share of what there is. Let us have patience. Put away the money, dear. There is a whole fortnight before us. Let us try everywhere. It isn't so hot now.'

'No. But it will get cold soon, and then—why—Katie'—she laughed bitterly—'with no work to do, no money for lodgings and food, and no clothes fit for winter, I do think we shall be the two happiest and merriest and most lighthearted girls in all the world.'

She laughed again, but hysterically. 'We will go about hand-in-hand up and down the streets, laughing and singing. We will go to church to join in the hymns of thanksgiving. Everybody will wonder to see such a happy pair.'

'Don't, Lily.'

'I must. Sometimes, I must speak. Oh! I must, when I think what has happened to you and me and what happens to other girls. Somewhere or other there are your cousins and mine, sitting in ease and comfort, a little anxious about their dresses, talking about their parties and their lovers, while you and I are looking forward to starvation. What have we done that we should be punished in this awful way? I say, Katie—what have we done? What have we done?' This was the question which she asked herself continually.

She sprang to her feet and rushed to the window and threw it open. The cold autumn air blew upon her forehead. Above the chimneys and the roofs and the stars in the clear sky there shone the calm, cold moon, full and bright.

'Oh!' she cried, 'I am full of dreadful thoughts—of things horrible and detestable. Katie, is there such a thing as religion? Then—why are we so deserted? We have done no harm to anybody, though we may have had bad thoughts. Why are we so horribly punished?'

'Don't, Lily—what is the good of asking?'

'I must ask. I have prayed—oh! I have prayed for hours in the night. I have torn my heart out with prayers. Is it wicked to pray for work and food? Why, there are thousands of wicked women who have plenty of food every day and no anxiety. Is there any such thing as wickedness?'

'Don't, Lily.'

It was all that she could say.

'The Heavens are silent. Look, there is the cold face of the moon. There is no care or trouble in it about us. Pray—Katie—pray, like me, till you feel as if your words were echoed back from the hard and senseless rocks. Oh! why were we born? Why are we allowed to live?'

She gasped and panted because of the thought that kept coming again and again.

'We are not obliged to live,' she went on. 'Katie, I am full of the most dreadful thoughts. It must be because we have so little to eat, I suppose, and because the future is so black. Horrible phantoms fill my brain, asleep or awake. I can't tell you what they say to me.'

'Let us pray again. We shall get, for answer, patience and resignation.'

Lily threw herself upon the bed, her face in her hands. But Katie knelt beside her and prayed for both.

In a fortnight a great deal may be done if you have luck. Alas! these girls had none. In October the people, it is true, have all come back, but the work has all been given out. At the Museum, Katie, a new-comer, was known to few: and there was very little work going at all. Outside, there seemed no situations vacant: even the cashier's place in the draper's shop at seven-and-sixpence a week was filled up—yet how readily now would they have taken that place.

They read all the advertisements and applied at all the offices; but there was nothing.

Then for a week they lived on the breakfast bread and butter; and in the evenings they sat silent, always hand in hand, in Katie's cubicle, waiting for the day when there should be no more money, hungry, footsore, and heartsore. And in the night there came the dreadful dreams which torture those who are insufficiently fed.

There came at last one evening—it was Friday evening—when there was no money, except a single shilling. Saturday morning is that on which the residents of Harley House pay in advance for the next week. If they cannot pay they must go. The rule is imperative. If the Matron were to break that rule in favour of any resident she must pay the money herself in advance. There is no suspension of that rule allowed under any excuse whatever. To suspend the rule would convert Harley House into a charitable institution, which, as is proudly stated in the prospectus, is not its character.

Therefore, the two girls would have to go. I think that the Committee, had they known the facts of the case, would have relaxed that rule, or even paid a week or two in advance themselves for these two girls.

By this time they had suffered so much that they spoke but little of their sorrows. They sat together and waited in silence. Next day, they would not even have a bed to lie upon or a place where they could sit apart from the rest of the world. What would it be like? I think that even in facing the most terrible suffering there is something that consoles in the curiosity of wondering what it will be like.

There is nothing in which people differ more than in the way they take disaster. Most of us are distinctly 'worsened' by mis-

fortune, particularly in youth. Of these two girls one at least, the girl with the splendid physique, born for the enjoyment of her youth, took punishment in the most rebellious way in the world. The more she was chastened the less was she resigned, until, in these days of the direst calamity, she was maddened with the sense of undeserved suffering. What had they done? Well: they had had fathers; Katie found that explanation of their troubles long ago. It really explains a great deal of human suffering, although two of the Prophets disagree about it. Katie endured in silence and put no question to the silent Heavens. Things that are ordered must be endured.

Downstairs, in the drawing-room, the Residents were talking of them. Ladies who go in hunger are very slow to speak of their own sufferings, but they are quick to perceive the privations undergone by others.

'They have not taken tea for a fortnight,' said Miss Beatrice, 'the Matron told me so.'

'Katie Capel has sold her engagement-ring,' said another. 'Nothing but the most dreadful necessity would compel her to do that.'

'They have pawned all their clothes except what they stand in,' said another.

'They have tramped over the whole of London and they have found nothing.'

'And they have no friends at all. Neither of them has any friends or any relations that she knows of.'

Then there was a murmuring among each other, and presently Miss Beatrice went round with a pencil and a bit of paper and whispered with each.

It was Lily who really understood what their future meant; at least, she thought she did, and she began to draw a realistic picture of what was going to happen. It was almost worthy of the great Master of the Horrible and the Disgusting. Over a great part of it I have dropped a veil.

'To-morrow,' she said, 'we shall begin to starve. We may, if we are fortunate, catch cold and die quickly of pneumonia or bronchitis. That is to say, you may. As for me, I never catch anything, because I am so strong. We have got a shilling; we shall use up that in penny loaves: I don't know how long it will last, because I am not going to keep any account of time. What does it matter whether we starve in a week or in a fortnight? The sooner 'tis

over the sooner to sleep. Because starving, you see, Katie, is a very slow and troublesome way of dying. We shall wander about till we are obliged to sit down, and the policeman will order us to move on. Then we shall feel very weak, as well as very tired, and we shall stagger as we go, and tumble down, and they will carry us to the station, and say that we are drunk.'

'Don't, Lily.'

But she went on. It seemed to console her, or it fed her rage, to picture the very worst that could happen.

'You are happier than I, dear, because you are not nearly so strong. Why, there is a thin stick of an arm for you ; and look at mine, big and strong still, in spite of our privations. I am a dreadfully strong girl. When I was born, Katie—I have never told you this—all the wicked fairies came about my cradle. One of them said, "She shall have no mother ;" and another, "She shall have no relations to help her ;" and a third, "She shall have no friends ;" and a fourth, "She shall have no lovers ;" and another, "She shall have no money ;" and yet another, "She shall have no work ;" and another, "She shall have no food ;" and then there was one, the Queen of the Wicked Fairies—an old woman with only two front teeth left—and those sticking out over her lower lip—and a most malignant eye, who carried a cat-o'-ninetails instead of a sceptre. She stood over me and said, "This child shall be splendidly strong, so that she shall yearn and long horribly after all she cannot have, and she shall suffer twice as long and twice as much as any other woman."'

'Lily! Something may happen yet.'

'Oh! yes, something may. People have been known to pick up shillings in the streets. We may beg in the streets. We will borrow a hymn-book and sing along the road "In the Sweet-By-and-By." I've got a good strong voice. But we shan't like it. There will be such terrible discomfort about it that we shall go back to our starving and begin to get through the terrible job at once and have done with it. Katie, my head is full of horrible things. Suppose,' she whispered, 'suppose we resolve to die at once and have done with it?'

'No, Lily, no. Let us wait and receive what is sent.'

'It is truly wonderful, Katie, to hear you talk. Will nothing make you rebel? Why, if there is no place for us in the world, should we stay in it? Some women are born consumptive and have to die. Others, like ourselves, are born redundant. It is a new disease. There is now a great deal of Redundancy among

women: we suffer from Redundancy. It is incurable. No drops have been found for it and no pills. We shall have to die of that disease. "Died, in the streets on a doorstep, after long suffering, of Redundancy, Lily and Katharine." That would read very sweetly, wouldn't it, on a tombstone? But there will be no tombstone for us two, dear—we shall be buried by the parish in the pauper's corner, where the graves stand side by side as thick as they can be placed, and the dead bodies of the men and women moulder away forgotten. It will be like the sea that has closed over a sinking ship without so much as a single fragment left. In a few days we shall be as much forgotten as if we had never lived: perhaps to us it will be the same as if we had never lived.'

Lily's bitter words fell upon Katie like the blows of a scourge. She could endure, but she would not rebel.

'Leave us some hope,' she said. 'If you take away *that*, we are indeed the most wretched women in the world.'

Just then they heard a soft step coming up the stairs. Through the open drawing-room below, they could hear Miss Augusta playing the piano sweetly and softly. The step was that of Miss Beatrice the Consoler, who came to talk to them. 'My dears,' she said, taking a hand of each, 'I am afraid you are in terrible trouble.'

'Yes,' said Katie, 'we are in very sad trouble.

'Have you found nothing to do, children?'

'Nothing.'

'Have you no friends to help you?'

'Not one.'

'Oh! my poor children. But there is one Friend. Think of Him.'

Lily shook her head impatiently.

'Have you any money left?'

'No—none,' said Katie. 'And to-morrow we must pay the week in advance, or go.'

Miss Beatrice was silent, because it is difficult to find consolation for the lack of money: most of the poets and writers despise money: and yet, here were two girls who, because they had no money . . . .

'My dear,' she said, 'will the Matron not give you leave to stay a week or two on credit?'

'No—it is against the rules.'

Then Miss Beatrice exhorted them to patience, and told them in her sweet religious way how the Lord, who is the Father, is wont

to open unexpected doors and make things possible which had seemed impossible: until even the hard heart of Lily melted, and they all three wept together.

Then Miss Beatrice blessed them and went away with another exhortation to patience, and a hint, which she meant for a promise—but they were stupid and did not understand—that something good and unexpected would happen next day. Why—why did she not tell them what had been done? For in the drawing-room there had been a collection made for them, and out of their poverty and straitness these poor ladies had got together the sum of fifteen shillings and tenpence, which was to be given to the girls in the morning, so that they might pay the Matron and have another week to look about them and to find some employment. Also it was resolved unanimously that their cruel case should be brought before the Committee, although Harley House is not a charitable institution, in the hope that something might be found for them.

By a most unfortunate accident, however, that little collection never reached the hands for whom it was intended.

CHAPTER XI.

A NIGHT OUT.

THE breakfast at Harley House was served, to suit the convenience of those whose work begins early, at half-past seven. This was the last breakfast for which the girls had paid. They were the first to sit down, because they wished to avoid questions.

'This is the last breakfast paid for, Katie,' said Lily. 'Let us eat as much as we possibly can. When shall we get another breakfast, and where?'

Katie drank the tea, but unfortunately could eat nothing.

'You are taking a mean advantage, Katie,' said her friend. 'You know you are not half so strong as I am, and yet you are taking three hours' start in the starving race. Put something in your pocket. Never mind the rules. You must and shall.'

She cut off half a dozen great crusts and slices of bread and crammed them into her bag, the little hand-bag that carried absolutely all the possessions of the two girls. Their watches, their wardrobes, even Katie's engagement-ring, everything was gone except the clothes they stood in. Never was wreck more complete. Never had Misfortune made a cleaner sweep of everything. Friends, work, wardrobe, money—what more could she take? In a warmer climate she would have torn the clothes off their backs; but in

Great Britain this is not allowed to Misfortune, who leaves grudgingly their clothes upon the backs even of the shirt and matchmakers. One thing more was left to Misfortune. She could separate the two girls. You shall see presently that she even accomplished that.

'Now,' said Lily, 'we have eaten our breakfast—at least I have. Let us go at once, before the Matron comes down, and while there is nobody to ask questions. Come, Katie, we have left nothing upstairs. Come.'

Now that the supreme moment had arrived, when there was no longer any room for hope, Lily assumed a defiant air, much as one who is led forth to the stake and blasphemes the Holy Inquisition to the last. 'Come, Katie,' for she lingered and trembled. 'Come, I say. It will not help us to wait—and cry. We have done our best; we have prayed and there has been no answer. Let us go out now and starve. Come, dear Katie—oh! my dear—it will not help to cry. Let us go out and find a place where we can sit down and wait.'

It was eight o'clock. When the door closed behind them, Katie sank upon the doorstep and broke into sobs and moaning.

'Oh, Tom—Tom!' she cried. 'How can you be happy in Heaven while I am so miserable here? If I am to join you, ask them to kill me quickly.'

'They'll do that,' said Lily grimly. 'Come.'

She put her hand in Katie's arm and dragged her away.

Five minutes later Miss Beatrice came downstairs, her face full of sweetness and satisfaction, because she was now going to demonstrate to these two girls, by means of her collection of fifteen shillings and tenpence, how faith and patience and resignation are always rewarded.

But they were gone. One of the servants had seen them leave the house. Upstairs, they had left nothing.

Perhaps they would return in the evening.

But they did not. The evenings came and went at Harley House. The girls came home at night heavy of eye and head, tired with their day's work; Miss Augusta played to them; Miss Beatrice talked to them. For a week or so they remembered the two who had sunk under the waters; then they forgot them. As for the collection, it was all returned to the donors, and only Miss Beatrice remembered the girls and prayed for them that they might yet be saved.

At nine o'clock Katie began to be tired.

'Are we to walk about all day long, Lily?' she asked. 'Can we not find some place to sit down and rest?'

'We will go to the British Museum. It is quiet there, at least.'

They did. They went to the room where are the great pictures of Assyrian battles.

Here they sat down. The place was very silent and peaceful. There were very few visitors so early; the attendants with their wands sat about already disposed for the gentle doze which helps them through the day. Presently Katie leaned her head upon Lily's shoulder and fell fast asleep. But Lily slept not. She had been awake nearly all night, but she was not disposed for slumber. She sat looking at fate with wrathful eyes and continually putting the same question—it has been asked by every unhappy person since the world began—'What have we done—what have we done—that we should so suffer while the rest of mankind escape?'

The morning passed—noon came—the attendant woke up and began to saunter about the rooms with the intention of getting an appetite for dinner. One o'clock struck—Lily sat motionless, unconscious of the time—Katie still slept beside her. The attendant went away to his dinner, and returned refreshed but languid, and disposed for another doze. When he awoke at three the two girls still sat there, one asleep, and the other bolt upright, her dark brow contracted, her black eyes full of rage.

It is not an unusual thing at museums of the scientific kind for tired visitors to sit down and go to sleep in them, nor is it quite unknown, in collections which are free, for people to drop in for the sake of rest. Bethnal Green Museum is naturally considered in the neighbourhood as erected mainly for the convenience of children, and a place of safety for them in bad weather. The custodian therefore regarded the sleeping damsel without surprise.

It was about half-past three that Katie awoke.

'Well, dear,' said Lily, 'you have had a long sleep. Do you feel better?'

'Yes, I am quite well now. But oh! Lily, I am so hungry.'

'It was a good thing that I remembered to put some bread in my pocket. Let us eat our dinner.'

They did so, and were strengthened by the bread.

'And now, Katie, we may move on. I don't quite know where we are going. But we had better go, I think.'

They went outside and turned westwards. Fortunately it was a fine afternoon, and warm. After the bread they felt strong again, and able to walk.

They found themselves, after wandering for half an hour, in St. James's Park. It was then five o'clock.

'Katie,' said Lily, 'do you see those seats? There is a whole row of them outside the railings. They are to be our bed to-night. To-morrow—no, we must not think of to-morrow—do you think we might break in upon our shilling? Oh, how tedious it is! Look at the heaps of people who are doing nothing; I wonder if they are as poor and as miserable as ourselves.'

St. James's Park this afternoon was thronged with people. They lay about the grass; they sat upon the free benches; they leaned over the railings; they stood upon the bridge; they threw crumbs to the ducks; they looked as if they never did any work, and did not want to do any work, and never had any work offered them. They might have been as poor as the two girls, but they were certainly not miserable at all. It may be laid down as a broad principle that nobody is ever miserable who has solved the problem of living without doing any work. At six o'clock the evening was beginning to fall. Then Lily drew Katie, who was now simply acquiescent, out of the Park.

'We will spend threepence,' she said. 'We will buy more bread, because that goes furthest. With threepennyworth of bread we shall have a supper that will carry us on until the morning. Why, Katie, we shall actually, with care, make our shilling last till Monday morning. That is splendid. After that I suppose we shall fulfil the purpose for which we were born and be starved to death. Come, dear, don't give in; hold up your face: try to look as if you liked it.'

When the lights were lit in the street and the shops, there began for a few minutes a new interest, but it lasted a very little while.

'Lily,' said Katie, 'I *cannot* walk any more. Take me to some place where I can sit down.'

'Well, then, we must go back to St. James's Park. It is the only place that I know of where we can sit down.'

At this moment a great piece of luck befell them. They met, walking up Waterloo Place, no other than Dittmer Bock. That young gentleman had been turning his Saturday afternoon to useful account by observing how trade was conducted in the West End.

'Oh!' cried Katie. 'We are saved, Lily! Dittmer! you will help us.'

She explained the situation in a few words. But the young German's face dropped. Alas! he had but eightpence in the world; he had lent three shillings and sixpence to a friend—one

of the three who shared his room—and he could not possibly be paid before Monday. What was he to do? How could he help them? Eightpence is a ridiculously small sum. Would they go with him to his lodgings, where he would persuade the other men to give up their beds and bestow themselves somewhere—on the landing, for example?

'No,' said Katie, 'we cannot do that, Dittmer. I am afraid we must spend the night here, in the open air, and perhaps to-morrow you will come for us and find some way of helping us. Oh! it will not be so very bad here; the night is not cold, and our jackets are thick. I am not afraid, now that we have found you.'

Dittmer hesitated. He had nothing to pawn—no watch or chain—he had no other clothes than those he wore; his friends and fellow-clerks were as poor as himself; at that moment he had no more than that eightpence with which he had proposed to tide over the Sunday. With only forty pounds a year, you see, a young man is liable to days of tightness; he takes them as a necessary part of a situation which is only temporary. Therefore he laughs and goes hungry with a cheerful heart. If an old man has to go hungry, he grows melancholy, because the situation is permanent, so to speak. But that a time of tightness should have happened at such a juncture was indeed unfortunate. The eightpence was altogether at their service. But yet . . .

'I know a man,' said Dittmer, 'who will lend me five, or even ten shillings on Monday. My friend will also pay me back two shillings out of my loan on the same day. Perhaps our landlady would take you into the house, but she makes rules and will admit no ladies at all to her lodgings. But it is impossible, Kätchen—you cannot pass the whole night upon a bench. It is impossible.'

'We must,' said Lily. 'If you have not any money, there is no help for it. If that were all, what matter?'

'In that case,' said Dittmer, 'I shall pass the night upon the bench with you. Himmel! Could I go home and leave you here—by yourselves?'

He turned and walked with them towards St. James's Park.

'Oh, Katie!' said Lily, 'what a difference—WHAT a difference it makes to have a Man with us! I feel somehow as if we should pull through our troubles. I don't know how it is to be done or why we should think so. But he inspires confidence. Courage, dear, we have a Man with us. Oh! why don't they keep a Man at Harley House only in order to inspire confidence?'

They began their night at about half-past seven, when the place

was full of people walking through, but the girls were tired. They tied their handkerchiefs round their necks and sat close together, Lily on the outside and Katie between her and Dittmer, by which means she was a little protected from the cold.

A night in the open air in the month of October may be enjoyable under certain conditions, which must take the form of thick blankets to begin with. But it cannot by any stretch of imagination be considered warm. The revulsion of feeling, however, with the two girls at meeting with a protector, the change from despair to confidence which Dittmer inspired, made them suddenly gay. They laughed and prattled; they made little silly jokes which pleased them all three; they seemed to passers-by like a party of young people perfectly happy and without a care; just as if their limbs were not aching all over and their feet were not getting as cold as a stone; and as if they were not desperately hungry.

'It is nine o'clock,' said Lily. 'Time for supper. Herr Dittmer, will you join us? We have a beautiful supper, made altogether of the finest wheaten meal, exquisitely prepared and most delicately baked till it is a beautiful rich brown. It consists partly of crust and partly of crumb. Pray, which portion do you prefer, or shall I assist you to a little of both—without the stuffing?' and then these foolish girls laughed.

They were safe. Dittmer had them in his charge. They were quite safe now.

Dittmer refused to share in their supper because he said, mendaciously, he had already made a copious meal of bread and sausage, which would serve him till the morning. Then the girls ate half the bread between them, and wrapped up the rest for their breakfast.

At about ten the number of passengers greatly diminished. About the same time it grew much colder; a little wind sprang up, rattling among the sparse leaves of the trees. Katie kept dropping off to sleep and waking again with a start. Lily seemed sleeping soundly, and Dittmer was smoking a cigar stolidly. At last Katie dropped her head and fell into a sleep from which she did not awake till midnight, when she started into wakefulness. Dittmer Bock still sat with a cigar between his lips, patiently, as if nothing was the matter.

'You are cold,' he said. 'Take my hand and run a little, or jomp, joost jomp.'

Katie tried just to jump, but she was too tired either to run or to jump. She was desperately cold. Lily, for her part, seemed to

mind nothing. Also, Katie longed with an intense yearning to lie down and stretch herself out.

Then Dittmer showed the ingenuity of Man.

He made her lie along the bench, her head in Lily's lap. He wrapped her skirts tightly round her feet. He found a pair of gloves in his pocket—he wore twelves, I think—and put them on Katie's hands, over her own, so that she had a double pair. And then he produced his own handkerchief—a large coloured silk handkerchief of a patriarchal character—and tied it round her neck and over her head. Lastly, he sat down at her feet and laid the skirts of his great-coat over them, so that she might be still more protected from the cold.

'Now,' he said, 'Schlafen sie wohl, Kätchen.'

He lit another cigar—remember that they were cigars of Hamburg, not of Havannah—and Katie dropped off to sleep again.

She did not wake up till five o'clock. The young German still sat patient and resolute, his hands in his pockets; he was nearly frozen with the cold; he had turned up the collar of his coat; and he had not slept for one single moment during the whole night.

'Dittmer,' said the girl.

'Ya; I am awake. Sleep on, Kätchen. It is only five o'clock.'

'No, I have slept long enough. And the seat is very hard.'

She got up and looked about her. It was still night; by the lamplight she saw that all the benches near them were similarly occupied with sleeping figures.

'Are these people all as poor as ourselves, Dittmer? And, oh! you have put your own gloves on my hands and tied your handkerchief round my neck. Oh! it is good of you, Dittmer.' She took his hand. 'Yesterday I thought I had not a friend in the whole world except Lily. And I forgot you. Forgive me. I forgot that you promised to be my brother. And you have thrown your great-coat over me and are sitting without it. Oh! it is a shame. Put it on directly.'

'Kätchen, you must not forget. It is true that at this moment I have no more than eightpence, and to-day is Sunday, yet I will find something. Listen to my plan. There is a man—he is from Hamburg; he used to work for my father's Delikatessen-Handlung; he came to London to make his fortune, and has already a large baker's shop of his own. I will go to him; I will ask him, because he knows me, to take you into his house for a week or two until you can find a better place. The baker has a good heart; he will weep when I tell him your mis-

fortunes. Kätchen, it was very wrong to forget you had a brother.'

'I will never forget it any more.'

Dittmer kissed her fingers.

'All that I have—it is not much—is yours. All my brains; all my knowledge; all my work is yours, Kätchen. You are my sister; you are also the only woman in the world whom I shall ever love. Ja, my sister—I know. But for me there is no other woman in the world.'

Katie made no reply. The tears rose to her eyes. Perhaps, had he pressed her at that moment, gratitude would have suffered him to change the title of sister. But he was too loyal to take advantage of her emotion.

All this time Lily made no sign at all of being awake, or of hearing anything. She sat motionless and apparently sleeping, just as she had sat all the night.

Presently the dawn appeared and grew gradually and spread, until another day was born.

Then the ladies and gentlemen who had also slept in this *al fresco* hotel woke up and rose from their benches, and began to stamp and swing their arms, and in other ways endeavour to restore the circulation. They were of a broken-down and reduced appearance for the most part; perhaps because St. James's Park, to the neighbourhood of which they belonged, is situated in an aristocratic part of the town. When they had warmed themselves they all went their ways; some with a hopeful stride, but most, creeping, or slouching, uncertain: and what their ways were on this Sabbath morning, when no one could seek work anywhere and all the offices were closed, the Lord only knows.

'On Sunday morning,' said Dittmer, 'bakers sleep late. I go to seek my friend at seven.'

'I do not know,' said Lily, starting up with animation, 'that I have ever passed a more delightful night. I mean it, Katie. It was cold, I dare say, but the past is now done with. We have broken with respectability; we have spent a whole night out, sleeping in the Park. Whatever happens now we can never be governesses any more. We have lost our character. Nobody would employ a girl for a governess who had slept out all night. I rejoice. We have got a man to advise us. Let us eat up all the rest of our bread, and then we will go to find the baker. We are already on a lower level; we can now do any kind of work. I feel as if I could marry the baker and take the money in the shop.'

She divided the bread into three portions, but again Dittmer refused his share and the girls finished it.

'And now,' said Dittmer, 'I will go to prepare the mind of the baker. Wait for me here. In one hour I return. Then you will find repose while you look about and consider what is to be done next. In one hour I come back. Remain here without moving and I return: in one little hour I return. Ja. I komm.'

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE FOG.

He strode away in the yellow light of the autumn morning.

'He is gone,' said Lily. 'I feel as if I was going to despair again.'

'He will be back soon; let us walk about. But we will keep near this place for fear of missing him.'

'Katie'—no one ever anticipated, prophesied, and realized the future so clearly and so wholly as Lily—'I understand exactly what is going to happen. We shall go to the Baker. He will be, of course, a Master Baker, the Queen's Chief Baker, perhaps. He will be a friendly Baker, and he will talk English much worse than Dittmer; we shall stay with him for a week or two and then we shall go into the shop and keep accounts, or perhaps sell loaves and rolls and buns across the counter. I shall like selling the buns better than keeping accounts. But you will keep the accounts. Either occupation will be much better than teaching horrid children. And then, you know, when we have quite got used to the life, and forgotten all about Harley Street and remember only the misery of starving gentility, there will come along a handsome young baker of German origin, and we shall—that is, I shall—go off to church with him and keep his shop for him ever after.'

'It will be an honourable life. And oh! what does it matter to you and me now whether we call ourselves gentlewomen or not?'

'Nothing, my dear. But I wish Dittmer would come back.'

Where the fog came from I know not. But it fell upon them swiftly and unexpectedly. First, it turned the sun into a copper disc about the size of a warming-pan, and then it shut him out from view altogether. And first that fog blurred the branches of the trees and then it clothed them and covered them up with white clouds, and then it became yellow and caused the people who breathed it to cough and choke, and then it became suddenly black with the blackness of midnight.

'Katie, let us stay quite still. Let us sit here and not move for fear of losing him. This will not last long.'

It was a terrible fog: it was the well-known historical fog when the people could not attend the morning service, or, if any found their way thither, they found that the fog had filled the church so that nothing could be seen but the nearest lamps, and if any were in the streets they either stayed where they happened to be, or they rambled miserably about losing themselves.

The fog lasted all day long. Until nightfall it lay over the broad City, insomuch that infidels believed the story of Egyptian darkness, and many were converted. It killed a large number, of course, but I do not know how many; it developed asthma, bronchitis, pneumonia, and consumption in thousands who had thought themselves strong and lusty, and now go hobbling towards the churchyard; it gave atrophy to infants, indigestion to young ladies, and the middle-aged it deprived of their gastric powers, so that they have had, ever since, to give up all their beer, porter, port and sherry, burgundy and champagne, claret and Rhine wine, and now drink weak whisky and water with lunch and dinner. Singers it robbed of their voice; clergymen of their cheerfulness; actors of their memory: and working men of every kind and degree it filled with discontent as to their own lot, doubt as to their own powers, and despair as to their future. It was not until three o'clock next morning that it cleared away and people were able to look about again—and to see the clear sky set with stars and the ghosts all flying away and once more to hope.

By that time, as you will see, it was too late for Katie and for Lily.

They sat on their bench for an hour hoping that Dittmer would grope his way back to them, with news from the baker.

He was on his way back to them, with the best of news. But the fog fell upon him, as upon all the rest of the town, and caused him to stop and consider. He who in a black fog stops to consider is lost—for he turns round, and instantly forgets the direction in which he was walking. Dittmer Bock did this, and instead of marching straight back to St. James's Park, which was not far from the baker's, and in a south-westerly direction, he turned north and walked off resolutely in the direction of Edinburgh. So that when the fog cleared he was already well on his way to York.

The girls waited in the Park while the hours crept on slowly.

'If we do not move,' said Katie, 'the fog will lift, and he will come back to us. Let us wait.'

'I am hungry,' said Lily, who had the day before been so brave to face starvation. 'I must eat, whatever happens. Katie, will you sit here, while I go and buy something? I am certain that I can find my way back. We will spend all our money, and then trust to Dittmer.'

'Oh! Lily, you must not leave me alone.'

'Then come with me, Katie, we shall not be gone five minutes. I can find my way blindfold. To be sure it is blindfold. We keep quite straight along the railings and we get to Buckingham Palace Road, where there are coffee-houses.'

They kept along the railings without much difficulty; then they came to the corner and had to cross the open Place before the Palace. And now the trouble began; after what seemed to Katie half an hour, they found themselves not in Buckingham Palace Road at all, but in front of more railings. The thick brown fog grew darker and thicker: then a terrible bewilderment fell upon them: they knew not which was north, south, east, or west: they knew not from what quarter they had come, or where these railings might be: and there was nobody to ask; they were lost in the fog, like Dittmer himself, and like every human creature out on that terrible Sunday morning—when the wayfarers wandered in the fog like those poor lost creatures who wander in the Desert, round and round, only to come upon their own footsteps again; or those who are lost in a Canadian forest and turn in a circle round and round, while they think they are marching in a straight line.

'What shall we do, Lily?'

'Let us walk along the railings: we shall find something.'

They found an open gate leading somewhere: it must be into the Park; but what part of the Park?

'We are lost, Katie,' said Lily; 'we must wait till the fog lifts.'

They waited, but it did not lift.

'Where does Dittmer live, Katie?'

'I do not know.'

'Where is his office in the City?'

'I do not know.'

'Then we are lost, indeed, if we cannot find him.'

They stood beside the railings, not daring to move. Nobody passed by: they were off the pathway. The fog deadened sound as well as sight. It was cold and damp: the fog was in their throats and in their lungs.

Presently the fog got into their brains as well. Then one of them, the stronger, began to have visions, and to see spirits which

marched past, a procession of devils who mocked, and of women who wrung their hands and wept—then more devils, and more weeping women. She kept none of these visions to herself, but kindly communicated them to her companion, who had slipped down and was crouched, clinging to the rail, on the cold ground.

'They are the women who seek for work and find none, Katie. Look at them: there is one as old as Miss Stidolph, and here are two like Miss Augusta and Miss Beatrice, but they haven't got their annuity, and there are two like ourselves. The devils mock them, and drive them with whips. Oh! it is dreadful to see them. Do you hear what they are saying? "This is what you were born for: nobody wants you; there is nothing that you can do; you will have to go on like this all your lives: you will live an immense time: every day you shall feel hunger, and privation, and disappointment. There is no love for you: there is not any hope for you of being cared for and caressed, with strong hands to work for you. No. No! these things are for other women not a bit better than you." Are you listening, Katie?'

Katie moaned in reply.

'We shall not go on being driven with whips, Katie, because we are going to die. Shall we be killed by the black fog and starvation? Or shall we die a quicker way? Think of another night in such a fog, and without Dittmer beside us.'

'Katie,' she repeated, 'think of another night out in this cruel place.'

Still there was no answer.

'Katie!' she stooped and lifted her head. 'Katie! are you dead yet? Are you so happy as to be dead?'

'No—I wish we were dead. Oh! Lily—Lily—how long—how long? Will Dittmer never come? The seat is cold: he is so good. He took off his coat and laid it over me. Dittmer is very good to us.'

She was lightheaded: exhaustion and cold made her forget where she was. She thought she was still on the bench in the Park, waiting for Dittmer to come back.

'She is faint with hunger,' said Lily. She instinctively felt her pocket. There was in it a rough crust, the last of the threepennyworth of bread. She gave it to Katie, who devoured it greedily.

'Are you better, dear? Do you think that you could stand? Do you think that you could walk a little?'

'Where?'

'It is not far—I should think about half a mile. This time I

know that I can find my way. I see it in my head, every inch, clear as if there were no fog, though it is as black as night.'

'Where, Lily? Do you mean'—she trembled, she rose and stood beside her friend—'do you mean——'

'It is the Embankment, dear. That is the place where women go to end their sufferings. The poor woman who has lost her virtue: the poor shirtmaker who has lost her place: the poor lady who can get no work: that is the place for all of us. One plunge, and it is all over—all the sorrow, and all the disappointment.'

'But after death?'

'After death I shall ask why we were forced to the Embankment.'

'Lily, I am afraid, It will be so cold.'

'We shall not feel the cold one bit. Think of another night! Think of the rest of the day! Think of day after day like this! . . . Katie, you shall hold my hand. Come.'

She dragged Katie away, walking with the strength of madness, as fast as her trembling friend could go, sometimes hurrying her, sometimes encouraging her, sometimes reproving her.

I know not how she found her way or by what strange trick of brain she was enabled to go straight to the Embankment at the point where it begins at Westminster Bridge. She took the shortest way through the Park and along George Street, never halting or considering or hesitating for a moment any more than if it had been a day of clear brilliant sunshine. Yet she had before lost her way simply in crossing from the corner of the railings to the Buckingham Palace Road.

'Only a few minutes now, dear. Oh, Katie dear, we shall die together; we will not let go of each other's hands. Remember that. The water will roll over us, and in a moment we shall be dead and all will be over. You will not die alone. We shall go into the next world together. No more trouble, dear. Perhaps you will join Tom and be happy. I think he must be waiting for you somewhere. It is the shortest way to reach him. And as for me—why—they say that eye hath not seen nor can tongue tell the happiness that we shall find there—and it seems to me that all I want is rest and to be sure that I shall have food to-morrow. You must not think of the plunge, dear—the river is not a bit colder than the air: think of last night: think of to-day: think of the night before us——'

'Lily,' said Katie, stopping, 'they are having service in the church by the Abbey: listen. Oh! it must be the evening service.

They are praising God and singing hymns—and we are out in the fog and the cold and going to kill ourselves.'

'Yes: I could not sing any hymns just now.'

'Lily, let us have one prayer before we go.'

'No—leap first and pray afterwards; there will be plenty of time to pray when we are sure that we shall not have to come back to this miserable world any more.' She dragged the other girl along with her—past the Abbey—straight down to the Embankment. 'Hush! Katie. Don't speak now. This is the very place.'

She stopped at one of the landing-places, where the steps go down into the water.

'The tide is running up,' said Lily. How did she know, because they could see nothing? 'It will carry us up the river: it will roll us over and over. Don't let go my hand, Katie: it will kill us in a moment, and then it will drive us and beat us and bang us against the piers of Westminster Bridge, so that no one will be able to recognise us when they do find us. And so it will never be known what became of us. Dear Katie, dear Katharine Regina—poor Queen without a penny—give me one kiss. Hold my hand. Now you shall be with your lover in a moment and all your sorrow shall be over. Hold my hand and run down the steps with me. Quick! Quick! Hold my hand hard—harder. Quick!'

She drew Katie to the steps, crying out to her to hasten and to hold fast, and dragging her down to the river; Katie was too weak to resist, mentally and bodily. And all around her lay the thick black fog like a wall of darkness.

Did you ever think what it would be to be shut up in such an Inferno as Dante's in a thick black fog, a darkness wrapping you round as with a horrible cloak from which there was no escape? All day long these girls had been sitting in such a fog, without food, and before them they heard—and now saw with eyes of madness—the rush of the river which would mercifully take them out of the fog and land them—at the foot of the golden gates?

'Quick—Katie—quick! Don't let go. On!'

The fog lifted a little, suddenly, at this moment.

Before the girls stood a figure, black and gaunt, which stretched out two long arms and said with harsh and strident voice:

'No, my dears. Not this time you don't.'

Then Lily loosed her hold of Katie's hand and threw out her arms in a gesture of hopelessness.

'Oh!' she cried, 'God will not let us live and He will not let us die.'

Then she turned and fled, leaving Katie alone.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE MORNING.

KATIE stood for a moment stupefied. In front of her, shadowy, like a ghost, rose this man gaunt and tall: by the lifting of the fog she saw that he was in tatters. What was he doing on the steps in the dark? And Lily was gone.

'No, you don't,' he said to her. 'I thought there'd be some of you coming along to-night. Is it hunger working up with the fog, or is it remorse and despair?'

Katharine made no reply. Where—oh, where was Lily?

'If it's hunger and the fog, you'll get over it when you've had something to eat. In course of time you'll get used to hunger. I'm always hungry.'

'Who are you? Let me go—let me go.'

'Not this way, then,' he replied—for she made as if she would rush at the river—'not this way, Pretty! Don't do it. Have patience. Lord! If you'd gone through as much as I have, you'd have patience. Don't do it.'

As he spoke the black wall of fog rolled between them again. Katie stole away under its protection, but she heard him repeat as she retreated: 'Don't do it, Pretty. Have patience.'

It is now nothing but a memory of the past; but sometimes the gaunt and tattered figure of this man, holding out his long arms between her and the river, returns to Katie's mind and stands up before her: she sees him blurred in the fog and the dim lamplight: she hears his voice saying, 'Don't do it, Pretty. Have patience!' Who was this man, this failure and wreck of manhood—and why did he lurk in the blackness upon those steps? Then her misery comes back to her again, her dreadful hunger and cold and weariness and desolation, and Katie has—change but one letter and the pathetic becomes bathetic, pathos turns into bathos—has to 'lie down'—woman's grandest medicine—until the memory of that night leaves her again.

The fog was so black again that she had not the least knowledge of the direction she was taking. Under each lamp there was a little yellow gleam of light. Beyond this a black wall all round it: when she stood under a lamp it was just exactly as if she were built up and buried alive in it with a hole for a little light of yellow glass in the top.

Sometimes, steps came along and faces came out of the black wall and looked curiously at her as they passed and disappeared. It was the face of a young man making his way home and marching confidently through the fog: or it was the face of a policeman who looked at her searchingly, asked her if she was lost, told her how to get back to the Strand, and went on his beat: once it was a girl of her own age who stood beside her for a few minutes and looked as if she wanted to speak, and then suddenly ran away from her. Why did she run away? Why, indeed? And once it was a very ugly face indeed, which greatly terrified her—a man's face, unshaven for many days, and therefore thick with bristles round the mouth, a face with horrid red eyes and red swollen cheeks.

'Have you got the price of a half-pint upon you?' he asked roughly.

'I have not got one penny in the world,' she replied.

Lily in fact had all the money belonging to them both—ninepence.

'You've got your jacket and your hat. Gimme your jacket and your hat.'

He proceeded, in the language common to his class, to touch briefly on the injustice of suffering an honest man to go about without a penny in his pocket while a girl had a jacket and a hat which might be pawned. Perhaps he forgot that it was Sunday. But other steps were heard, and the creature of the Night slunk away.

Katie knew that she was still at the Westminster end of the Embankment, because the great clock struck the quarters and the hours apparently quite close to her.

The night was still and not cold. She was afraid to move outside the little yellow circle of light; but she could no longer stand; she sank to the ground, and leaning against the lamp-post, she fell into a state of half consciousness. The place was quite deserted now, even by the birds of prey who prowl by night, and even by the homeless who come here when there is no fog and huddle together for warmth. When she lifted her head again and opened her eyes, cramped and cold, she saw that the fog was lifting and rolling away. The greatest horror of all—the long day and night of darkness—was passing away; a few minutes more, and the long line of lamps upon the bridge on one side and the Embankment on the other stood out clear and bright; the sky was clear and studded with stars; the air was pure again. To look round once more, to breathe again the pure air, brought

refreshment and relief. Katie got up and looked over the wall upon the river running at her feet.

She remembered that she had been very near to Death—a shameful, wicked, violent Death—the Death of those whose wicked lives have driven them to despair. One more step and she would have plunged into the dark waters rushing and tearing up the stream with the tide. She tried to picture to herself what she had escaped; she recalled Lily's words; she would have been, by this time, a dead body rolled over and over, knocked against the piles of the bridge, caught by the ropes of barges, banged against the boats. At last she would have been picked up somewhere; no one would have recognised her, and she would have been buried in the pauper's corner, forgotten for ever. But imagination, like reason, refuses to work to order unless it is fortified by strong food. The words she recalled and the picture she conjured up conveyed to her soul in her exhausted state little more than a trifling addition to her misery. When one is on the rack a touch of toothache would be little heeded. She shuddered and turned and slowly crept away. The great clock struck three. Lily was lost now as well as Dittmer. She was quite alone in the world, and penniless. But the fog was gone; the black wall of darkness had rolled away.

I know not where she wandered. It was no more beside those black waters, but along the streets—silent now and deserted, save for the occasional step of the policeman. It is strange to think of the great City with all its four millions of people asleep and its streets empty. Even the worst and the wickedest are asleep at three in the morning. It is the hour of innocence; the Devil himself sleeps. No one met the girl as she walked aimlessly along. She was so tired now that she had no room for any other feeling. She could no longer think or feel or look forward or dread anything. She sank on a doorstep and fell asleep again.

At five o'clock she was awakened by the hand of a policeman.

'Come,' he said, not unkindly, 'you mustn't sleep in the streets, you know. Haven't you got anywhere to go?'

She got up and began to understand what had happened. Another day was going to begin; she had spent two nights in the street. Another day! And she had no money. Another day—oh! how long?

'I have nowhere to go,' she said. 'And I have no money.'

'Won't you go home to your friends?'

'I have no friends.'

She did not look in the least like most of the girls who have no friends.

'Haven't you got any money at all?'

'I have no money, and no friends, and no work——'

Then this policeman looked up and down the street suspiciously, as men do who are about to commit a very bad action. There was nobody looking; there was nobody stirring yet; no one would believe in the bare word of the girl unsupported by any corroborative evidence; he would never be found out; *he did it.* He put his hand in his pocket and produced a shilling—a coin which is of much greater importance to a policeman than to you, dear reader—at least, I hope so—and he placed this shilling in Katie's hand.

'There!' he said. 'You look as if you were to be pitied. Lord knows who you are nor what you are—but there! get something to eat, at any rate.'

Then he marched stolidly away, and Katie sat down again upon the doorstep and burst into tears. She had not wept through all that long night in St. James's Park—to be sure, she had Dittmer then for protection; she shed no tears all the long, dark, and dreadful Sunday; she had been dragged by Lily to put an end to her life without tears; but now she sat down and sobbed and cried because the one unexpected touch of kindness, more than the cruel scourge of misfortune, revealed her most wretched and despairing condition.

'In the darkest moment, my dear'—she heard the voice of Miss Beatrice plainly speaking—not whispering, mind, but speaking out plainly—'in the darkest moment, when the clouds are blackest and the world is hardest and your suffering is more than you can bear, GOD will help you, and that in the most unexpected way.'

It was a very little thing—a shilling is not much—but it touched her heart as a single ray of sunshine lights up a whole hillside. And so she sat down and cried, and presently rose up and went on the way by which she was led.

My friends, we live in an unbelieving and sceptical generation, and the old phraseology is laughed at, and there is now, to many of us, no Father who loves and guides His children and orders their lives as is best for them, as we were once taught to believe; all is blind chance—even that policeman's shilling—even what followed, this very morning.

Katie's wandering feet led her to Covent Garden Market, where the [illegible] houses are astir and doing good business long before the [illegible]d is thinking of the new day's work. She went

into one and had breakfast—a substantial breakfast with an egg and a loaf and a great cup of hot brown coffee. Then—she went to sleep again, and another good Samaritan befriended her. It was the woman who waited—only a common, rough-tongued, coarse creature—but she saw that the sleeping girl looked respectable, and that she looked tired out; and she let her sleep.

It was past eight when Katie woke up. Mademoiselle de Samarie was standing before her.

'I—I—I beg your pardon,' said Katie, 'I have been asleep!'

'You've slept for three hours and more, Miss. Pretty tired you must have been to sleep in all this racket.'

'I've been walking about all night because I had no money.'

'Have you now? All night? Just think! And a lady, I should say—well now, Miss, if you'd like to brush your hair and wash your face and make yourself tidy upstairs, you can.'

Was there ever a better Samaritan?

Katie followed her. She would have cried again, but that she was stronger, being no longer hungry. But she kissed that woman of Samaria when she came away, and when Fortune smiled upon her once more, she sought her out and shed tears when she found that the good creature was gone, and that no one knew where she was to be found.

Then, refreshed and strengthened, and with renewed hope and with sixpence out of the policeman's shilling in her hand, Katie went forth again for the third day's tramp.

She thought that perhaps if she went back to St. James's Park she might find Lily waiting there for her, or perhaps Dittmer Bock.

The homeless and the penniless wretches who slept upon the seats were all gone now, dispersed for another day of vagabondage and of seeking, of stealing and lying; of wandering and enduring. But the seats were not empty. The morning was clear and bright: a beautiful autumnal day when the few flowers that are left put on their brightest colours and the yellow leaves stop falling. The seats were now occupied by the people who have nothing to do. They form, I believe, a class apart; they make a society of their own: they know each other and no doubt form attachments, get married, have children, and grow old and die. But, until they die, they never leave the Park any more than the ducks. It is curious and interesting to reflect that there should be a race among us, a race apart, who spend their whole lives in St. James's Park, and never do anything except sit on the free seats, doze away the sunny hours, lazily read the papers, converse with each other with intelli-

gence, but without enthusiasm, lean over the bridge and watch the boats and the ducks, stand about the approach to the Palace and look at the ladies going to the Drawing Rooms, assist at the playing of the band at ten o'clock, and never do any work at all. Yet they live and are fat. Somebody must work for them, unless the laws of Nature in their case are suspended.

These people, therefore, were sitting about, but there was no Lily, and there was no Dittmer Bock. As for the latter, he had got back early in the morning from the Great North Road into which he had been beguiled by the Demon of the Fog, and he was asleep in bed, but already dreaming that it was time to get up and dress and go off to the City, there to conduct the office correspondence in French, German, Swedish and Russian, until the evening came, when he should be free to find his way back to St. James's Park and search again for Kätchen.

Katie walked slowly up and down the whole length of the walk. Dittmer Bock, she now remembered, must be in the City at his office. If she only knew where that office was! There was no sign of Lily, anywhere. She left the walk and went into the Park. There she sat down and tried to think what was to be done next.

There came along presently an elderly lady dressed very neatly in a black silk dress and black silk mantle, with bugles, a jet brooch, and a little black leather hand-bag. She was in black, not because she was in mourning, but because she liked it. She went with a sort of hopping movement like a sparrow, and she had a sharp sparrow-like face with very bright eyes. When she saw Katie she stopped before her and made a leisurely but not impertinent survey of her.

'My dear young lady,' she said, 'you were here all Saturday night.'

Katie made no reply.

'You appear to be what the world calls Respectable. You are, doubtless, still in Society. Few of those who turn Bird Cage Walk into an Hotel are still in Society.'

Katie remained silent.

'My dear young lady, I saw you, on Saturday night. I am often here watching the people. You were with another girl and a young gentleman. Why were you three out all night? It was cold, too. If it was a freak of youth, let me tell you, young lady, that such freaks may bring you into trouble. And to-day you are here again, alone. What does it mean?'

Katie shook her head, but made no reply.

'I come to this Park a great deal. There are many most remarkable persons who use it. They are nearly all out of Society, you know'—why did the old lady whisper this information?—'men and women too—out of Society, you know. With a history, of course. I please myself by learning their histories. They illustrate the working of Fate. It seems to me, my dear, that you are meeting your Fate early in life. I did so myself. I could tell you most wonderful histories to illustrate the workings of Fate. My own is very remarkable, for instance. Quite unique. And yours too, no doubt. Where is your friend?'

'I do not know. I have lost her.'

'Ah! To be lost in this great City, if you have no money, is to court your Fate. I could tell you several stories about that now. Turn your eyes to the next bench but three, the second person sitting on it. Don't let her think she is watched. I could tell you a very curious story about that person. My dear, Fate is all about us: we do not know our Fates or we should go and drown ourselves: we should, indeed. I should, long ago, if I had known my Fate. I have sat about the benches at night and talked to them—and watched and listened. My dear, they all curse their Fate. So do I. It is most remarkable.'

Katie rose and fled. This old lady was like a dreadful nightmare. She walked out of the Park, afraid to stay in the awful place any longer; the place where men and women assemble to curse their Fate and to wish that they had drowned themselves long ago—why, what had she herself tried to do?

Then she thought that she would go to Doughty Street and see her old friend Mrs. Emptage again. Perhaps there might be some help even from that poverty-stricken household.

She walked all the way from St. James's Park to Doughty Street. It is a good step. You go along Long Acre and Great Queen Street, and Lincoln's Inn Fields and through Gray's Inn. For a girl who has been walking about all night it is a longish walk. Fortunately she had eaten a good breakfast, but it was at five in the morning. When Katie arrived in Doughty Street she found that the Emptage family had gone away, and they had left no address.

It was about eleven o'clock. Katie turned away wearily. By this time she had fallen into that strange state of mind when nothing seems to matter. The Emptages were gone: and they had left no address. This intelligence affected her very slightly. She saw that there was a gate on the left-hand side of Gray's Inn open,

and that it led into a garden where were trees and grass and seats. She turned in, took the first bench and sank down upon it. At the other end of the bench sat a young lady dressed in deep mourning.

'You look tired,' said the young lady presently, 'you look ill—are you ill? Can I be of any service to you?'

Katie turned upon her, in reply, eyes so haggard, a face so worn, so full of despair and misery, that this young lady started and shuddered.

'Tell me,' she said, 'what it means. Tell me what is the matter with you.'

Katie tried to speak. But she was past speaking. Her head dropped and she would have fallen forward upon the ground, but the young lady caught her in her arms.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NUBIAN DESERT.

THERE was an encampment at the going down of the sun in the Desert.

The great Nubian Desert is a terrible Desert indeed. It covers a weary waste of country which, if you will examine the map, you will find lying between the Nile—that part of it where the Second and Third Cataracts are marked—and the Red Sea. It is reported by those who have been across this Desert—the number, for certain reasons, is now much greater than of old—that there are mountains in it, all arid and bare, level plains covered with sand, rocky passes, and low hills surrounding small plains of sand. The sand is everywhere. It is a hot and a thirsty country: those who live in it are a thin, parched, and dried-up people, who are said to regard their abominable country with affection. Some of them, those who belong to the seaboard of the Desert, are not Arabs at all, but pure-blooded descendants of the blameless Ethiopians. They speak the same language as their forefathers, but they have changed their religion a good many times. First they left off worshipping the Gods of Troy and those of their cousins of Tyre, Sidon, Ascalon, Zoan, and Kadesh: they then became Christians and had a beautiful ecclesiastical Establishment all to themselves till the Arabs crossed the Red Sea and persuaded them, by those arts which have always proved successful in the conversion of a people, to renounce Christ and follow the Prophet. They eventually turned out the Arabs, but they remained faithful to the Prophet. The encamp-

ment was one of this people, but as to the manners, customs, language, and folklore of the tribe I am sorry that I cannot describe them in detail, because I have never been among them, and the two white men who have lived with them and might have learned so much never even mastered the language and made no notes. They were greatly unlike the German traveller who was lately taken prisoner on the south-east coast of the same continent, and kept on making notes of what he observed, even on the way to be 'hotpotted,' and being rescued from the very jaws of death, preserved these notes, which are a precious addition to anthropological lore as well as an example worthy of imitation by all travellers.

When the sun sets over the great Nubian Desert he paints the mountains and rocks all manner of colours, but especially those which have to do with purple, crimson, and yellow: he places the same colours, only paler, in the sky, and he condescends to light up the level sands with the most beautiful and wonderful mirages. This evening, for example, those of the people who cared to look for it might have seen in the south-west, and apparently within easy access, a most inviting oasis of verdure and beauty incomparable in any climate. Saw one ever such green grass, such blue lakes, such waving palms, such a suggestion of bubbling springs, green shade, fragrance of flowers, balmy rest, and universal delight? Yet there were two in this encampment who gazed upon the scene without joy and without admiration.

'There it is again, Tom,' said one of them, 'a very creditable mirage. You would swear that it was real, wouldn't you?'

'Ah. This is the Land of Tantalus. We are always thirsty, and there are always dangled before us the water and the fruits which we may not drink or eat.'

It was not a luxurious camp; the water the people had to drink was warm and blackish; the only protection they had against the night-dews were the cotton sheets which by day the men wore as mantles or wrapped round their bodies; the food they had to eat consisted chiefly of dates. The men were armed, for the most part, with spears and shields, though there were old guns among them. One would certainly not think the tribe or the encampment worthy of the notice of history save for the fact that right in the middle of the camp there were sitting, without any protection of white cotton tent, the two Englishmen whose remarks on the mirage you have just heard. They were prisoners of war, whose lives were spared when the Egyptians were all speared. Why they were not massacred with

the rest has never been found out. Perhaps it will remain a secret for ever.

They were pretty ragged by this time, having been prisoners and on the tramp for six months. Their coats hung upon their shoulders in long strips, which they would have torn off but for the protection afforded against the sun; the legs of their trousers had been mostly torn off in strips in order to provide bindings for their feet, from which the boots had either dropped or had been taken off. To walk barefooted in the African sands is for English feet very nearly the same thing as to walk upon ten millions of sharp-pointed needles all red hot. Even the eleven thousand British virgins of Aachen had only one pin for the whole lot to dance upon. But suppose they had been ordered to dance upon ten millions of pins apiece! Their flannel shirts were in strips; as for watches, revolvers, glasses, water-bottles, belts, and everything else, these had long since been taken from them. Of all their kit they preserved only their helmets, which, as bound in common gratitude, had in return preserved their owners' lives against sunstroke. Their hair had grown long and matted, like the black ringlets of their captors; their faces were covered with thick beards, and six months' wanderings in the desert on a diet principally composed of dates and brackish water had taken the superfluous fat from their figures, sharpened their features, given their eyes a peculiar brightness and eagerness unknown in countries of civilization, where the human eye is apt to swell with fatness, and doubtless added ten years to their lives should they ever get home.

The scene before them, apart from the mirage, was a landscape of low hills and rolling ground; everywhere was gray sand with, for vegetation, tufts of dead desert-grass. The two Englishmen sat side by side in silence. There was nothing to say. When a man has been made to tramp, without aim or object, for six long months, during which he has had no news of the outer world, and has been all the time hungry and thirsty, he is not inclined to talk. To-night the two men were so tired with the day's march that they sat without speaking a word, until one of their captors brought them supper, consisting of some bread and dates with a draught of water.

'Tom,' said one of them, 'is the finest champagne at the club comparable with a good pull of warmish water in such a place as this and after such a day's march?'

Tom was at the very moment taking that pull.

When they had eaten their supper they began to talk.

'Tom,' said the first, resuming the conversation of the preceding night, 'my opinion remains the same. We have come back somewhere near the place where we started.'

'You see,' said Tom, 'that if you should happen to be wrong our goose is cooked without the least doubt, and we shall either starv in this infernal Desert or be captured again, when we shall mos certainly be stuck.'

'Yes—but I am sure that I am not mistaken. I remember th outline of these hills the very first day we were brought in, whe we expected to be killed every instant.'

'It may happen any minute as it is. These fellows are not in hurry, because we are always in their hands. As for me, I ver well remember the funk I was in, but I forget the hills.'

'Tom, *it is the same place*,' the other man repeated earnestly, ' am sure it is. We are within a few hours of the Egyptian fort I believe they have come back here in the hopes of meeting othe tribes and getting up another massacre if the Egyptians can b lured outside their walls. Tom,' he lowered his voice to a whispe though no one could understand what they were saying, 'withi half a day's march is freedom, if you want to win it. Do yo understand that?'

'It is not a dark saying, old man. As for my *wanting* to win it, he replied—'you're a soldier. Take the command and tell me wha to do. I will obey if it leads to death, McLauchlin, on the bar chance of getting out of this.'

'We will wait until they are all asleep. They have left of setting a watch. Then we will quietly slip away and make for th coast. I am sure we are near it. I can smell the sea; though it i only the Red Sea. If we are lucky we shall sight the fort and th ships.'

'And suppose we take the wrong turn and go north instead o south?'

'In that case, Tom, we shall travel round the whole world twenty-five thousand miles or thereabouts, before we get to the fort At twenty miles a day it is only twelve hundred days, or four years allowing us to rest on Sundays.'

'I should give up trying for the fort and strike off north-west where London is—and Katie,' said Tom, with a curious catch in hi voice.

'I've got a Katie too,' said the man called McLauchlin. 'I'd g north-west with you, old man. Oh! Tom,' he laid his hand on th other's shoulder, 'to be free again! To go home and tell them w

are not dead, after all. Do you sometimes think of them crying over us?'

'Have I thought of anything else during the whole of the time? And my girl, you see, has got no one, and now she must be friendless. All day long for six months I have heard her sobs. If we do get away from this prison—if ever there is a real chance of freedom again, I will tell you about her. I couldn't here.

Tom said no more.

The sun went down at last with an undignified bob, as one who is long in making up his mind to go and only goes at last because he is obliged. Immediately afterwards the colour went out of the sky and out of the hills, and then, because there is not much twilight in the great Nubian Desert, the night fell, and the children of the Desert ceasing to chatter and to scream and to quarrel, lay down upon the sand, still hot with the day's sun, and were all asleep in a few minutes. Presently, Captain McLauchlin touched Tom's shoulder, and they arose and looked round them. By the light of the stars they could see the sleeping forms all round them. Only half a day's march to freedom! But suppose McLauchlin had made a mistake? Suppose he had been deceived by the outline of the hills? Then, as Tom truly prophesied, they would either starve slowly—it is a lingering complaint, including the torture of the burning heat of the sun and a maddening thirst—or they would be recaptured, and then they would be certainly speared for good. Freedom, however, is worth some risk; for the sake of freedom men have run the chance of many deaths, and those even more cruel than hunger and thirst in the Desert. These two men might have fled in the same way nearly every night. What use? One might as well leap overboard in mid-ocean and hope to swim ashore as fly from an encampment in the heart of the Desert. Yet even that leap has been sometimes taken, when it has been thought better to sink down in the dark green waters, to lie quiet for ever and undisturbed among the shells, than to be any longer a slave or a convict. With freedom within half a day, who would not risk even that march round the world of which Captain McLauchlin had spoken?

A fortnight later the same two men lay in two beds in the hospital of the friendly Fort, now garrisoned by English as well as by Egyptian troops.

The half-day's march had in fact turned out to be a march of two or three days with no food and no water, because, you see, they did take that wrong turning. When the fugitives were picked up by

accident and a good way from the Fort, they were very terrible to look at, black and gaunt and fierce-eyed with thirst and hunger and the heat of the Desert under the fierce sun and the glare of the water, because they were upon the shore of the Red Sea. Already they seemed to hear the flopping of the vulture's wings and the bark of the jackal, when they were rescued by a party of English officers come out to shoot.

At first, nobody knew them. They were brought in and put to bed, and for a week or so they could not even tell their story. When that story was fully heard, those that listened marvelled, and were sore astonished, because their escape and return to their friends was like a resurrection from the tomb. Long since, it was supposed, their bones had been bleaching upon the sands with the bones of the poor Egyptian soldiers who could not run fast enough to get away. McLauchlin had been gazetted as killed; Tom Addison, war correspondent, was reported killed. By this time their friends would even be going out of mourning.

'Six months, Tom,' said McLauchlin this afternoon, the room being quite quiet and shaded, and the pain well nigh gone out of their feet, which had swollen up and behaved in a most abominable manner, and inflicted disgusting torture upon them. 'Six months, Tom, may go a long way to make a fellow forgotten even by his girl. They've got the telegrams by now, and by next week or thereabouts they will have the letters. I wonder——'

'So do I,' said Tom.

'Whether Katie will have forgotten?'

'Just what I was going to say,' said Tom. 'There's been a good many odd things happening in the last six months or so, old man. When they brought us in and my head felt like one inflamed balloon, and my chest like another, you began to talk of your Katie, and I began to think we had got mixed up somehow. You've got a Katie, and so have I. They can't, I suppose, be the same girl, by any accident?'

'Mine is named Katharine Regina.'

Tom fell back on his pillow with a groan.

'So is mine,' he said. 'We have got mixed up.'

'Katharine Regina Willoughby, mine is.'

'Katharine Regina Capel is mine,' said Tom. 'There's a chance for us yet. But isn't it odd that there should be two girls christened Katharine Regina?'

'Perhaps they are cousins. There is always a Katharine Regina in the Willoughby family. Who are your girl's people?'

'She hasn't got any people. She is absolutely without any relations.'

'No people ?'

'No. There is nobody else like her in the whole world. When I was taken from her she lost the only person in the world who cared for her. Poor Katie !'

'But she must have had parents, and they must have had cousins.'

'Most girls have. Mine did not. She had a father, and his name was Willoughby Capel.'

'Willoughby ! That is strange, too. What was he ?'

'He was a gentleman by profession. He was an idle, selfish, luxurious, useless creature, in reality. He had been in the army, and he lived on some allowance, or annuity, or something, the nature of which he never told his daughter. Nor was she told anything about her relations. Her mother was an actress, but Katie was not permitted to know her name, and she died in childbirth. There is the whole story.'

'It is only the beginning of one. Why did the man keep his daughter in ignorance of her relations ?'

'Well, you see, there is one reason which immediately suggests itself to the adult. It is based on that adult's experience of the wickedness of human nature. The man must have done something which cut him off from the family, or else perhaps all the family must have done something simultaneously, and so cut themselves off from him. There are a good many actions which are still recognised as being dishonourable, even in this lax age. There are so many, in fact, that there are enough to go round a very large family, and very likely it was the cousins who disgraced themselves with one consent. But I doubt it, sir.'

'Tom, it's a very curious thing, and perhaps it means nothing, and is only a coincidence, but there was a fellow in my Katie's family who was formerly in the army, and turned out a very bad hat indeed. He had to send in his papers for something he did. I never heard what it was, but the rest of his family would have nothing more to do with him. He was always in debt, I know, for one thing, and he was pretty unscrupulous as to getting out of debt.'

'You would suggest that this amiable person was my Katie's parent ?'

'Perhaps it is only a coincidence. Still, there are other points. This gallant officer of ours married an actress. So did yours.

Whether there were any children or not I do not know. Then, however, come the names. Why should he call himself Willoughby for his Christian name? Because it was his surname? Why should he call his daughter Katharine Regina? Because it was a family name? Again, it was Katharine Regina Willoughby, my Katie's great aunt, who kept our man going. She used to say nothing about it, but it was known in the family that she did so. Tom, I firmly believe that your Katie is my Katie's cousin. What sort of a man was her father to look at?'

'He was an extremely handsome man, tall, and with regular features—what is called an aristocratic-looking man.'

'All the Willoughbys are tall and extremely handsome. My Katie——'

'And mine as well,' said Tom.

'What colour was his hair?'

'It should have been gray, but he dyed it. I suppose he kept to the original colour, which was a dark brown. His eyes were brown.'

'Good heavens, Tom. This is wonderful. I have no doubt at all that he was old Miss Willoughby's favourite good-for-nothing nephew. What a strange thing it is that we should have been lugged about together over that accursed Desert for six months, and that we should be engaged to two cousins!'

'I dare say you are right,' said Tom. 'But as my Katie doesn't know of your Katie, I don't see how it helps her at the present juncture. Stay. Good heavens! If I had known this six months ago I need never have come out at all.'

'Why?'

'Because the fortune to which I did not succeed was to go to the heirs of this very Captain Willoughby, and, if you are right, it is my own Katie after all who will have it! Old man, that escape which you planned and carried out meant more than our lives, more than the happiness of the women who love us; it meant, only I did not know it, the restoration of Katie to her family and to her fortune. Good heavens! It is wonderful. It is truly wonderful.'

Here the conversation ought to have ended; the curtain ought to fall at this point. What followed was weak—very weak.

'Old man,' Tom went on, 'if I had known that all this was involved in our getting safe to this haven of refuge, I believe I should never have pulled through with you. I should have been too nervous. The sun would have killed me; I should have fallen

down with heat apoplexy; I should have stepped upon a flying serpent; I should have irritated a winged dragon; I should have died of that awful thirst; I could never have survived the overwhelming desire to get safe home in order to give that poor girl back to her friends and her fortune. As for me, I've been dead for six months. She has had time to get over the shock, but she little thinks, when I do come back, what I am bringing back with me—beside myself.'

CHAPTER XV.

JOYFUL TIDINGS.

HARRIET ROLFE had never, before this evening, felt what it means to be truly happy. For she was as well dressed as she desired to be: that is to say, as she had learned to be, because she never soared to the heights of those ladies who resign themselves into the hands of their artistes, but arranged, considered, designed and chose for herself, which is much the best way if you have a touch of genius. Next, she was in society: that is to say, she sat at the head of her table, presiding over the first dinner-party given by Mr. and Mrs. Hanaper Rolfe—the second Christian name came in handy—in their new house.

There were no ladies: but as yet Harriet had not arrived at the stage of desiring the society of ladies. Her own sisters, cousins, aunts and early friends could not, she knew, be asked to meet gentlemen, and, besides, she liked to be the sole object of their admiration. She was conscious that few women can be certain of calling forth this admiration. In a crimson-velvet frock with dead-gold bracelets and necklace, with her tall and shapely figure and her comely cheek, she looked indeed a splendid creature. James regarded her with pardonable pride.

There were four guests: one, a certain baronet whose acquaintance James had made in a billiard-room which he frequented, where the marker and the habitual players called him Surennery. To be called Surennery must be true enjoyment of a title. He was a handsome man, still young, of five-and-thirty or so, with rather a weak profile. But his eyes were sharp, like unto those of a hunter. His private fortune was said to be nothing at all, and his enemies declared that he lived by pyramids and shilling pool. Certainly he was a good player and he played a good deal, perhaps in the interests of science and to keep up his skill. He 'moved,' as they say, chiefly in the society of those actors and actresses who

are not invited to the houses of the Great. The only occupation, besides that of billiards, for which Nature had fitted him, was perhaps that of a genteel shopwalker.

There were besides, three other old friends of the turf and the billiard-room invited in order that they might see for themselves in what magnificence their former pal, once so hard-up, was now living. Nowhere else, certainly, would these gentlemen get such rare old Port: such East India Sherry: such a bottle of Château Lafitte. For Uncle Joseph's cellar was one of the good old kind, such as is now seldom found, in which the wine has been laid down affectionately and with forethought, as if life was going to be continued far beyond the usual limits.

The magnificence was so great and the presence of the crimson velvet so overwhelming that the conversation flagged during dinner. There was only one topic on which Sir Henry could converse, and he was uncertain how it would be received if he was to start it—namely, actors' gossip and green-room whispers.

When Mrs. Rolfe rose the host pushed about the bottles. But the evening was 'set dull:' no one said anything which called forth a spark of interest. At last Sir Henry made a remark which, though he did not mean it, fell like a bombshell and wrecked the house.

'I saw a War Office man just now,' he said; 'he told me that they have just had a telegram about those two fellows who were supposed to be murdered.'

'What two fellows?' asked James, quickly looking up.

'Captain McLauchlin and the newspaper chap. It seems they were prisoners and have got back. It will be in the papers to-morrow.'

Jem poured out a glass of Port and drank it. Then he took another—his face was very white and his hands trembled. The three old pals, who knew how he had come in for his money, said nothing but looked at each other with meaning. Then, as if resolved to make the most of an opportunity which would probably never return, they fell upon the Port with avidity, drinking about a bottle and a half a head. If this was true here was an end to Jem Rolfe's magnificence. Soon he would return to the old haunts and be as hard up as his neighbours; as keen over a pool; as hot for a tip; as ready to borrow; as loth to lend; and as eager in the pursuit of what they and their like fondly call the 'oof bird.' Pity that this excellent Port should be again secluded from the thirsty world! On the other hand, as has often been pointed out, the

satisfaction with which men regard the misfortunes of their neighbours soothed their souls. Poor old Jem! He looked pale and his lips trembled. He also winked with both eyes several times.

'The newspaper chap, Sir Henry,' he said with dignity, but huskily, 'was—I mean is—my first cousin.'

'Oh! I am sorry I spoke so hastily.'

'Not at all. The news naturally surprised me. We had all given him up long ago. Poor old Tom! He had no brother, and we were brought up together.' This was a decoration, so to speak, of the truth. 'To think that he should turn up again, alive and well—you said that both were alive and well—and well?'

'My War Office man certainly said that both had been prisoners and had escaped.'

'Let us hope that both are well. There is a girl somewhere about, who will be a happy woman to-morrow when the news comes. Not to speak of another woman not a hundred miles from this house.'

He was doing it very well, thought the pals. Then they began to talk of the strangeness of arriving home when one has been reported dead and been given up for lost, and mourning has been ordered and worn—and wills proved—conversation during which their host winked his eyes hard many times.

Before they went upstairs he made a little request of them:

'My wife,' he said, 'was very fond of my Cousin Tom.' She had never even seen him. 'She is a very sensitive person—highly strung and that, you know,' he winked again, 'and the news of his death affected her terribly. Do not breathe a word of this joyful intelligence. I will break it to her carefully to-morrow morning, so that she may not lose her night's rest.'

Going upstairs the three pals nudged each other. A hitch with the elbow is often better than speech, and communicates more than mere words can hope to do and in much less time. I have sometimes thought that to be dumb, considering the expressive power of the eye, the head, and the elbow, is an affliction much lighter than many others. The pals meant that Jem was keeping it up first-rate.

Upstairs, Harriet gave her guests tea and a little music. She knew how to play simple accompaniments, and had a strong full voice of rather coarse quality which would have done well for the burlesque stage or the music-hall—and she sang sentimental and pathetic ditties.

'You ought to be on the stage, Mrs. Rolfe,' said Sir Henry. 'By George, you ought!'

'Oh! Surennery, I don't sing half well enough for that,' she replied.

'You sing ten times as well as most of them. And you look twenty times as well as any of them,' he added, in a lower voice.

'Oh! Surennery!' She looked at her husband, who was gazing into the fire with an expression, as she read it, of determined grumpiness. 'That is one of your compliments.'

'It is not, Mrs. Rolfe—it is the truth. There isn't a woman on the stage who has got your looks or your voice. You should go on the boards—you should indeed; lots of ladies are going now.'

Then he sat down himself and sang two or three French songs, quite certain that no one would understand the words.

'I do think, Jem,' she said, when her guests were gone, 'that when you bring your friends upstairs you might do better than sit in a corner and look as glum and grumpy as an undertaker at his own funeral. Unless you've had too much wine.'

'Yes,' her husband replied, 'it is all over, my dear. Now we can go back to the fun of the old days again——'

'What do you mean?' she asked sleepily.

'And to Stockwell again, if you like.'

'What do you mean, Jem?'

She was wide awake now.

'And to the jolly old days of fighting the landlord.'

'Jem——' She turned quite pale, for her husband's face was serious. 'Jem! for Heaven's sake, what has happened? Has a will turned up?'

'Worse than that.'

'Have you been losing the money, betting?'

'Worse than that, Harriet.'

'What—worse?'

'The very worst; the most unlucky thing in the world. Harriet, he isn't dead after all.'

'Not dead! Tom not dead!' She clutched the back of a chair with both hands. 'Not dead?'

'Tom has turned up again, none the worse. He has only been a prisoner among the Arabs and he got back safe. I don't quite know how long it takes to get from Suakim to London, but we may be pretty certain that he'll cover that distance in the shortest time on record.'

'Oh!'

There was a conscientious, a heartfelt ring about the interjection The deepest grief, the most profound despair, the most bitter helplessness—all were there.

'Well, Harriet,' her husband continued. 'It's no use shutting our eyes. Out we go, my dear. We needn't go just yet; when Tom comes home, he shall find us keeping the house warm, because we couldn't get a tenant; and as for what we have spent, trust me for running up a bill of costs and throwing dust in his eyes.'

'Jem—you are a fool.'

'Why, my dear?'

'What does it matter about the past? It's the future—oh, my God! it is the future. What shall we do?'

Jem, who had been walking about the room, sat down and faced her with a look of bewilderment.

'I don't know, Harriet. If I only pull through this business—why—it's a——' She understood not one word of what he meant. 'Good heavens! If I pull through—it seems hardly to matter what becomes of us afterwards.'

'We shall have to go back to the old wretched, miserable life. Where are we to find the money even to pay the rent? We've got no furniture; we've got no money; we've got no practice—oh! Jem—Jem—how are we to live?'

She sunk into a chair and gasped.

Her husband was still occupied with his view of the situation.

'The future may take care of itself, Harriet. It's the past that I look at. Nobody can prove that I knew that girl to be the heiress—thank goodness, that can't come out. Very well then—let us face the situation. Tom was dead. Before Tom went away he gave me a power of attorney. Well, I am the natural heir. I advertised for the heir-at-law of Captain Willoughby Capel and no one replied. Then Tom was killed—I naturally succeeded—I am his only cousin, on that side. . . . Then he comes home again. I say to him, "Tom—my dear old Tom"—being much affected—"how glad am I to restore all to you. The heir cannot be found, and you had better sit down and enjoy the fortune." If he does, I have got the knife into him, because the Trust money ought to go back to Miss Willoughby's heirs. If he does not, he will make me the solicitor, and if I know my way about, some of that money shall stick.'

'What are you talking about? What girl? What Trust?'

'Well, Harriet, there was no use telling you; but if you hadn't been a woman you would have asked a few questions about the sudden accession. You see I am one of the heirs to Tom's estate —no one can ever get over that; one of them—and the others are in New Zealand—but it's loaded with a Trust, and we did not know to whom that Trust ought to be handed over just when he went away. Well, you see—first of all, I promised Tom solemnly that what was left when that Trust was paid should be given to his girl.'

'You promised to give away your own?'

'You're a fool, Harriet. It wasn't my own. It was his. If I hadn't promised he would have made a will on the voyage, and given it to her. Besides, I didn't put that promise into writing. Well—after Tom went away I found that even if this Trust money was paid there would be an uncommon tidy bit left. So of course I wasn't going to regard such a promise as binding—not likely.'

'Well, and did you pay the Trust?'

'No—I didn't. You see, my dear, there's this certain fact about the Trust, that not a soul knows anything about it except Tom and me. It should go to the heirs of a man who is dead—if not, it would have to revert to the heirs of the original donor . . . Very good—the awkward thing is that I haven't paid it to either; and now Tom is come back and there will be the devil to pay.'

'Oh! Who is the heir?'

'I found out some time ago. It is no other than Tom's own sweetheart, Katharine Capel. She doesn't know and Tom never knew——'

'Where is she?'

'I don't know. That is the thing which will save me. I don't know where she is. Pretty ragged and down on her luck she looked the only time I saw her. It was then that I found out the truth.'

'Jem,' said Harriet, in the direct manner peculiar to her sex, 'you are a scoundrel.'

Her husband made no reply.

'You have stolen all this Trust money. And as for the rest, we were only part inheritors.'

'Don't be a fool, Harriet. It was for your sake. How else would you have got that crimson-velvet dress? Don't call names, but see if you can't help me out of this mess.'

'How are we to live, I want to know?'

'Lord knows! The first question is—how will Tom take it? And how can I put it to him?'

'When we go from here, where are we to go? What are we to do? You have deceived me again. You ought to have told me everything. You ought to have behaved honest to that poor girl, whatever else happened. I never thought that I should be able to call my husband——'

'Be quiet, damn it!' he cried. 'Stop nagging, Harriet, and listen. There are lots of things in the house which may go out of it with us. They'll never be missed. My aunt's jewels—Tom doesn't know anything about them—take and put them up with your own things. Send away the servants and then we'll pack up all we can. Hang it! There's my uncle's old silver mugs and things—we'll have them too. There's a lot of valuable books. I don't know much about books, but I know some of them are worth money. There's the pictures. The house is full of pictures. A lot of them can go without being missed. I don't suppose Tom ever went into the bedrooms——'

'Is that the only way you can think of to keep your wife?' Harriet asked with scorn.

'Well, if it isn't good enough for you, find another way. How did I keep you before?'

'You were spending the last of your money. When it was gone, if it hadn't been for Tom's death, I suppose you would have had to become a billiard-marker, because no one certainly would employ you as a lawyer. It was a horrible life that you made me lead. A thousand times a day I wished I was back at my quiet old stall. Oh! I *will* not lead that life again.'

'Well, Harriet, strike out a new line for yourself. What do you propose to do?'

She tossed up her arms and gasped for breath.

'Oh!' she cried, 'and I thought it was all over and we were going to be respectable. Can I never sit down and be happy and well-dressed, with a proper house and servants and no anxiety about the money? Oh, Jem! what a fool I was—what a dreadful fool—to marry you!'

'Perhaps, my dear, you will remember that on the other hand you've had a really beautiful four months. I wonder how Tom will take it. How shall I put it to him? You see, he's quite sharp enough to guess that I meant to stick to it.'

'Oh! He ought not to have come back. After all these months he ought not.'

'That, my dear, is quite true. I am now going downstairs for a pipe and a glass of whisky and potash. Come down with me, if

you are able to talk rationally. Come, Harriet,'—he offered to lay his arm round her neck, but she pushed him off. 'Don't be cast down; we will find out something. Look here: Tom's girl is going to have the money. I will make out such a case of my zeal in proving her to be the heiress that we may get a lump out of him. Besides, there's the jewels and the mugs and everything that I mean to stick to—and the bill of costs. Don't be downhearted.'

She pushed him from her with the vigour which one might expect of her proportions.

'Oh! well—if you choose to be a vixen, you may. Don't think, Harriet, that I'm going to slave and worry on account of a she-devil. If you've got nothing better to do than to show temper—as if I wanted Tom to come back—I shall . . . go and have my pipe by myself.'

It was a tame and impotent conclusion, but she turned upon him and looked so fierce that he collapsed.

In the small hours of the morning James woke up suddenly. The blinds were up and the moon was streaming in at the windows. Harriet was standing at the window in her nightdress.

'Harriet,' he cried, 'what are you doing?'

'I've had a dream, Jem,' she replied. 'A dreadful dream. I thought that you were tried by the judge and sent to a convict prison for robbery and I was left destitute. And I'd got a knife in my hand'—she held up her hand and showed a dagger which gleamed in the moonlight; it was only a little ornamental paper-knife, but it flashed like steel—'and I was going to kill myself and have done with it. You were a convict working at Portland, Jem.'

'Come back to bed this instant!' he said sternly. 'You and your dreams—come back and go to sleep. . . .'

She obeyed and went to sleep again calmly and sweetly. But her husband's teeth chattered and he trembled and shook, because his actions would, he was conscious, bear such a construction. And Tom was on his way home, doubtless having much wrath.

CHAPTER XVI.

TOM'S RETURN.

TOM did cover the ground between Suakim and London in the shortest time on record. The story of his captivity and escape of course reached home before him in scrappy fragments, which made everybody talk of the two prisoners. So that they were the Men of the Moment. It is a great thing in one's life to have been, if

only for once, The Man of the Moment; the honour is one which is bestowed upon people variously distinguished, and may be shared with Mr. Gladstone or with Charley Peace. But Tom neglected his opportunity, and refused even so much as to read a paper at the Royal Geographical.

It was one morning at the beginning of November, about a fortnight after that awful fog, that Tom arrived at Victoria. He had sent telegrams from Suakim, from Cairo, from Brindisi, and from Paris, all addressed to Harley House. He would not burst upon the poor girl without warning. She would hear of his safety from the papers; she should hear of his return from his telegrams. Poor girl! Poor Katie! His eyes filled when he thought of her trouble and sorrow on his account. But now all the trouble was over. She knew that he was safe. She was happy again—poor friendless Katie!

Six o'clock in the morning, and not yet quite light. You cannot call at a house, even to see your sweetheart who has supposed that you are dead, at six o'clock in the morning. The lazy maids are not up at six in a London house—they are only turning round in the sheets, uneasy because they ought to be getting up and because they are possessed by that pleasant, teasing, winning, masterful, persuasive, coaxing Devil (I know not his name) who haunts the bedrooms of young people at times when they ought to be getting up, and when the clocks are striking with all their might, and holds them as if by strong arms in bed, and weighs down their eyelids and makes them helpless with sleep as by enchantment, insomuch that for the sake of another hour in bed they are ready to brave everything, even a month's notice. It is recorded of a certain mediæval housemaid—I think the story is in the autobiography of Guibert de Nogent—that one day, under the malign influence of this Devil, she actually sold her soul for one more hour's roll in the sheets. This was duly granted to her. She is now punished—*là bas*—by having no sheets at all to roll in.

Six o'clock in the morning. Tom put his kit into a cab and drove to an hotel, the only place where a welcome awaits the returning traveller at six in the morning. Then he made up his mind not to hurry things. Katie must have time to get up. He would restrain himself and call at nine. He would have a tub after his long journey, get into a change of clothes and take breakfast first. Even the Troubadour gaily striking his guitar on his way from Jerusalem would take his breakfast before he sought out his lady. Tom took his tub and his breakfast; after that, he took a pipe and

the morning paper. It was only eight o'clock when he had quite finished both. But he could wait no longer, and he set off to walk.

You know how, when one goes to keep an appointment, or to execute some important business, the mind shapes out beforehand exactly what is going to happen, and you prepare in readiness what you will say, and what the other man will say, and what you will say next. Nothing is ever done without this preliminary imagining and picturing to one's self what is going to happen; and by the universal consent of all mankind nothing ever happens at all as it has been previously mapped out and imagined. Generally, the thing receives a totally different manner and shape at the very outset; one is put out at the first start; the other side sets the whole thing agee after you have rounded it off and made it dramatic, with all the 'fat' of the dialogue given to yourself, and basely says things totally unexpected and totally unprovided for.

Tom pictured in his own mind the sweet face of his girl and her lovely eyes looking into his once more—he knew that they would be full of tears—and her dear hands laid in his. He tried to think what she would say, but he did not get beyond her face and her eyes and her hands. Of these he was quite sure, and he clung to them. Half-past eight. He was opposite Harley House. The door opened and one of the residents came out. It was a girl employed in a shop as cashier; her hours were from nine till eight. His heart began to beat violently. Suppose it had been Katie! He would wait no longer.

'Miss Capel, sir?' asked the girl, who was a new-comer. 'There is no lady of that name here.'

This was the unexpected; this it was which threw him out altogether. For that Katie should have gone away was the last thing he expected.

'She was staying here six months ago.'

'Yes, sir. I've only been here ten days.'

'Will you give me her present address?'

'I'll ask the Matron, sir.'

She left him in the hall, and presently the Matron herself came to him.

'Miss Capel left here three weeks ago,' she said.

'My name is Addison.'

'Oh!' she said, 'you were engaged to her, and you were killed in Egypt. I know now. Oh! sir, I am so sorry. Because I don't know where she is gone to nor what she is doing.'

'Why did she leave?'

'She left because she had no money to pay for her lodgings and could get no work. There was nothing but trouble for that poor girl. First she lost you, and it would have moved the heart of a stone to see her going about so heavy and sad. Then she lost her place. And then she tried and tried, but what with its being summer-time, when there is no work going, and what with the many poor young ladies everywhere looking for work, she could find none. And so her money got lower and lower and lower, and —Oh! sir, don't look like that—you'll find her somewhere.'

'Tell me all. Let me hear everything.'

'She had a great friend here, another girl named Lily Doran. They stood by each other and shared their money as long as it lasted. Then one morning they went away together.'

'Where did they go? They must have had some place to take their things.'

'They had no things. They had sold or pawned everything—their watches went first and their clothes last.'

'Oh! Katie!'

'I would have kept them, but it is against the rules. No one is allowed to stay here a day after she is unable to pay her weekly bill. Harley House is not a Charitable Institution.'

'Gone! Where could she go?'

'They must have gone to their friends and relations.'

'Katie had neither friends nor relations.'

'Could she have gone to your friends?'

'I have only one relation in London. She may have gone to him for help. She knew his address.'

'Go and inquire, sir. Don't be downhearted. Young ladies don't get lost in London. She *must* be somewhere. Give me your address, so that if we hear anything—some of our ladies may have heard of the two girls—I will inquire and let you know.'

Tom turned sadly away. Katie gone, and in great distress. Nobody knew better than himself how friendless she was. She had no money left. She had to go.

Perhaps she had gone to his cousin. The more he thought of it, the more likely this appeared to be. Jem had promised faithfully, in case of his death, to give her whatever was over after the trust-money was paid. But she had no money. Therefore there was nothing left over. As for his cousin, Tom knew very well that he had no money of his own. He walked to Westminster, where Jem had his office; it was no use driving, because he would not be there before ten. When he got there he learned that Jem had removed

to New Square, Lincoln's Inn—his Uncle Joseph's offices. This seemed perfectly natural. He retraced his steps and walked all the way back from Westminster.

In the old office everything looked exactly the same as in the old times. The door was open, and behind the door sat the office-boy, who at seeing a visitor jobbed a pen into the ink and made pretence of being immensely busy. Within, the two gray-headed clerks did much the same thing with the difference due to their time of life; that is to say, they dipped their pens with dignity and looked wise.

In his uncle's office he found his cousin.

'Tom!' He sprang to his feet and seized both his hands, and laughed and grinned and made every possible demonstration of joy, winking hard with both eyes at the same time. 'Tom! old man! welcome home! welcome! I was about the only man who always refused to believe that you were killed. Shake hands again!' he repeated the outward and visible signs of delight. 'I always refused. Why? Because they never found your body—the body itself is a piece of evidence that should never be forgotten. And none the worse? Let me look at you. None the worse, I believe.'

'No,' said Tom, 'none the worse, except for worry and anxiety.'

'Ah! you worried about not being able to escape.'

'Well; one looked to be speared every day; and one expected to get sunstroke, and one worried about the people at home; and the food was pretty bad, I can tell you, and there seemed no chance of escape; and—but there . . . Where is Katie?'

'You mean—oh, yes—I had almost forgotten—Miss Capel. I don't know, Tom. How should I?'

'I left her at Harley House, where she proposed to remain. But she has gone and left no address.'

'Why, bless my soul!' said Jem, suddenly recollecting, 'she called here—how long ago? About four weeks, I think—to ask if there was any hope left of you. I could give her none, poor thing! none. It was no use telling her that I myself believed you to be alive, was it?'

'She called—here? How did she look?' Tom asked hoarsely.

'She looked, as far as I can judge, very well and very beautiful. In deep mourning, Tom, but very well and very beautiful.'

'Did she—did she seem in poverty or distress?'

'I observed nothing.' Jem shut his eyes and opened them several times rapidly. 'She was not, to be sure, dressed for the

Park. But she said nothing about any other distress than her distress on your account.'

'Poor Katie! Jem, you made me a solemn promise before I went away—a solemn promise.'

'I did, old man—I did. If I had observed any signs of distress—if she had given me the least hint of trouble in that way—I would—I would have parted with the bottom dollar to relieve her. I would indeed, Tom.'

'Thanks, Jem.' Tom gave him his hand. 'Then she said nothing about being in want?'

'Nothing. Not a word.'

'Yet it must have been about that time that she left Harley House.'

'Tom,' said his cousin earnestly, 'I hope that you believe me when I say that I remembered that promise.'

'I am sure you did,' said Tom.

'I have never forgotten it,' he went on confidently. (This assertion, to be sure, was perfectly true. He had never forgotten that promise.) 'I assured you that when the Trust was paid I would look after her.'

'No—you would give all that was left, if there was any, to her.'

'Just so. I fully acknowledge the promise. Well, Tom, the Trust has not been paid off. I have advertised everywhere for the heirs of Captain Harry Willoughby, but have had no answer.'

Perhaps he advertised in the dark arches of the Adelphi or in the tunnels of the Metropolitan Railway, because those advertisements could never be found in any of the ordinary channels.

'As for your Uncle's estate, Tom, I found it in a devil of a mess, and it will take another six months I dare say to unravel it all and get at a clear statement of how you stand. But there will be more left over than I thought at first. I can promise you that, Tom. A good deal more. So much is certain.'

'Oh!' cried Tom, remembering. 'As for the heirs, I have made a discovery. Oh! a wonderful discovery.'

His cousin turned pale.

'What discovery, Tom?'

'I have found the heiress. It is none other than Katie herself, Jem, I am sure of it—I am quite sure of it. Oh! if I had known before I went away!'

'Is it possible? Miss Capel herself?'

'Her name is Willoughby. But where is she?'

'I don't know: but she can't very well be lost. She must have

seen the telegrams about your return—you've been spread out fine and large for the last week or so, old man—and she'll be sure to write to you or come to you. She knows your address, of course.'

'She knows my old lodgings and she knows the address of the paper.'

'Don't worry about her, Tom. Go to the paper and report yourself. And you'll find a letter waiting for you.'

'I'll go at once.'

He rushed out of the office.

An hour later he returned.

'There's no letter, and I've been to the lodgings. No letter has been sent there, and nobody has called since you took away the books and things.'

'There are your books, Tom.' He pointed to the shelves where they were arranged. 'They are safe enough. But as for this young lady—it looks odd; but then, you see, lots of women never look at a paper at all, while there's others who'll read every word from beginning to end every day, and wish there was more—especially more law cases.'

'What shall we do, Jem?'

'There's only one thing to be done. Advertise. Leave it to me.'

'I suppose I must,' said Tom unwillingly.

'Leave it to me. I will soon find her for you if she is above ground. And now, Tom, let us go back to that discovery of yours.'

'The heiress is none other than Katie herself.'

'So you told me before. How do you know, eh?'

Tom briefly related the points—we know them already—which had led him to connect Katie with the Willoughby Trust.

'Strange!' said his cousin. 'It seems plausible; it may be true.'

He was at the same time thinking how this new turn of affairs suited his own line of action, in a very delicate situation. Fortunately he had told no one but Harriet of his own discovery. It now seemed as if nothing could fall out better. Of course the girl would be found immediately—probably through his own agency; he would be the benefactor; that would create a bond of gratitude and friendship.

'It may be true,' he repeated. 'What kind of man was this Mr. Capel, or Willoughby, if that was his name?'

'A tall man, who had once been handsome, and was still good-looking; about fifty-six years of age; with aquiline features, and eyes very clear and keen; he used to dye his hair, which was brown.'

James Rolfe rang a bell. One of the clerks came in.

'Will you tell this gentleman,' he said, 'what sort of man to look at was Captain Willoughby—you know—the man who came once a quarter to draw his money?'

The clerk described him almost in the same words as those used by Tom.

'The description corresponds,' said the lawyer with the astuteness of his profession, which never fails to perceive that things which are equal to the same thing are equal to each other, and that two and two make four. 'I remember him quite well, and I recognised in your description the man who used to come here for his money. But I wanted the corroboration of a second witness. Upon my word, Tom, I begin to think you must be right. Remember that we could find no relations to Mr. Capel; and when I advertised for the heirs of Captain Harry Willoughby, we got no answer, because, as we know pretty well, his own family have long since cut him off. I believe, Tom, that you are right. In that case—lucky dog!—the inheritance will be yours after all!'

'Katie's, you mean.'

'The same thing, my dear boy, in spite of the Married Women's Property Act. Just the same thing; well, I'd ask you home, but Harriet—who is a woman of a highly sensitive nature—she used to see your ghost at night when you were first reported as killed—has become so touched with thankfulness at your safety that I do not think it would be wise to bring you home without first preparing her.' He thought of the moonlight dagger scene, and was afraid. 'After you went away there were no tenants. I took temporary possession of the house in Russell Square. I hope you approve.'

'Oh yes. Why not? Somebody must live there, and why not you? Besides, it is not my property, but Katie's.'

'Well, Tom, we don't know yet. Besides, you gave me a power of attorney, and of course I have been administering the estate. But I should not like to do anything without your knowledge and approval.'

Oh! James! and the cellar of wine! and the jewels, and the old silver mugs, and the books, and the pictures!

'Find my Katie—only find my Katie, Jem.'

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SEARCH.

THEN the advertisements began. They did not appear, this time, in dark tunnels and on inaccessible peaks, but were duly displayed in the second column of the *Times*, and in the 'agony' columns of the *Standard*, *News*, *Telegraph*, *Post*, and *Chronicle*. James was now honestly anxious in his own interests that the girl should be found. He was satisfied that Tom would ask no nasty questions when the statement of his affairs was presented to him, and there was a great difference between handing over the Trust to the heirs of Miss Willoughby deceased, and retaining the papers so as to act as the family solicitor for Katie after she was found. This, together with the indirect methods, so to speak, which he had already proposed to his wife, seemed to be a natural and easy way out of the mess. But every day, as this young man contemplated the pile of papers connected with the estate, he cursed the luck that brought his cousin home again. And every day when he went home—they remained at Russell Square, but the establishment was reduced to one miserable old woman, and there were no more dinner-parties—Harriet received him with gloomy looks and sullen speech. As if it was his fault that Tom had returned! He put this to her, but she made no reply, except by that kind of look which makes a husband at once wrathful and small.

The advertisements began. Before long the whole country knew that one Katharine Capel, aged twenty-one, had disappeared: that when she was last seen she had on a black jacket, a black woollen dress, a hat trimmed with black velvet, and a gray 'kerchief round her neck: that she was five feet five in height, and had light-curling hair, regular features, and gray eyes: and that she was accompanied by a young lady, also missing, named Lily Doran, of dark complexion, dressed in brown serge, with a black jacket, and a red handkerchief. Yet the whole country combined was unable to produce either of these young ladies. For some five weeks or so the advertisements were continued. You shall hear, directly, how they came to be discontinued. They produced three letters.

The first was from Mrs. Emptage, and was of no use, because her information ceased with the day when Katie left the house: but it was an honest, good letter, full of kindness towards the missing girl, and Tom went to see the writer. The Emptage family had removed from Doughty Street to a small semi-detached cottage

near Kensal Green, where there is a whole village of cottages let at eleven shillings a week each, inclusive of water-rates and taxes. No servants are kept in these cottages, and the children go to the Board School, where they are much better taught than by governesses like poor Katie. Mrs. Emptage wept over her lost governess, and her vanished gentility, and the reduced salary, mixing up all together, till the series of disasters became one and indivisible, as if Katie, in leaving the house, had carried out in her handbag the fortunes of the family, and the family pride and dignity. But she could give no guess of what had become of Katie.

The second letter was from Dittmer Bock, who asked for an interview.

His information carried on the fortunes of the two girls for twenty-four hours after they left Harley House. But, alas! it confirmed the news of their utter destitution. In the fog he had lost them, and he knew no more. Whither had they strayed, hand-in-hand, that hapless pair, in the yellow fog of that terrible Sunday?

'I have seeked,' said Dittmer. 'Ach! Himmel! Heilig! I have seeked in the bureaux where the names are taken of ladies who want places. Nowhere do I find her. Whither is she gone? What does she do? Honourable Herr War-Press-Correspondent, what does she do?'

It came out, in subsequent conversations and examination, how he had passed the night with them and pledged his credit—the credit of a German clerk on forty pounds a year!—with the friendly baker for them.

'Her heart was broken—Ja, Herr War-Press-Correspondent—broken when she heard that you were killed. Afterworts she never smiled except with the children of the gracious Lady Emptage. Broken was her heart. Once I ventured to ask would she graciously give me only one of the fragments. But she would not part with the smallest piece. All—all—are yours, Herr War-Press-Correspondent. Now you are back recome, and she, who should have returned to the frühling and the time of roses—where is she? Love waits for her, und die Hochzeit—the High time—but where is she? I ask the everlasting stars.'

There was no reply from the stars, who of late years have ceased to interest themselves in the fortunes of men, and are now silent, perhaps unmoved, spectators, and refuse by any combinations of their own to reveal the future or to guide the conduct of those who consult them.

There was, however, a third letter. This came from Harley House, and was signed Beatrice Aspey. It was written in the old-fashioned, straight-lined Italian hand which was formerly the only kind permitted to women. Tom called upon the writer, who had nothing to tell him but the history of the last weeks of privation and fruitless hunting for work while the slender resources of the two girls wasted away too rapidly. But she told him as well of Katie's patience and her grief. And she spoke with so soft a voice, a manner so gentle and a face so sweet, that his heart was drawn towards her.

'And, oh! sir,' she concluded, 'I am sure—I know from my experience that the two girls must have gone for days and days with nothing to eat from breakfast one day to breakfast next, because their breakfasts were all paid for beforehand, you know. And when they went away Katie told the Matron that they had not enough, between them, to pay for another week. And they had parted with all their things.'

'Oh!' Tom groaned. 'My poor girl! My poor Katie!'

'All they took away with them they carried in one small hand-bag. I don't think they had even a change of clothes.'

'Make haste—tell me all.'

'That is all. To look for work week after week: not to find it: to starve: to grow shabby and poverty-stricken in appearance: and at last not to have money enough to pay for bed and breakfast even in such a cheap place as this! That is all, except that other girls have friends, who will in the end, though often grudgingly enough, do something when it comes to the worst. These poor girls had no friends. There were never two such girls in the Home before. Their dreadful friendlessness brought them together. They shared what they had: they suffered together: and, oh! Mr. Addison, they went out into the streets together hand-in-hand, quite penniless. Don't cry; it is dreadful to see a man cry. Perhaps they have found friends.'

'But where—where—where? And why don't they answer my advertisements?'

'Why, girls like that never look at papers except to see if there are any vacant places for which they can apply. What do they want with newspapers? What interest can you expect a girl to have in the world when all her thoughts are centred in the difficulty of finding food?'

"Into the streets, friendless and penniless,' Tom repeated. 'Poor Katie! Poor child! Was there no one in this House, where there

are twenty women and more, all of whom knew of her dreadful trouble, to do her the simple charity of keeping her from starvation? Not one?'

'There are thirty women in this House. Not one among us all,' Miss Beatrice answered with quiet dignity, 'is ever rich enough to give away half-a-crown. This is Poverty Hall. This is the Refuge of those who are broken down early or late in life: we are beggars all, except my sister and myself, who live on a little money which allows us to give a penny but never a shilling. Oh! there are pitying hearts among us. Do not doubt that; sometimes one's heart is like to burst with the miserable pitifulness of it all and the want of power to help it.'

'Yet—so little would have done to help them over a week or two.'

'How do you know that some of the other women here were not in the same plight? Do not condemn us hastily, Mr. Addison. Only the night before they went away, we made a little collection for them, and between us we raised a little purse of a few shillings for them. Alas! when I got up in the morning to give it them, they were gone. And we have never seen or heard anything of them since. I wanted to tell you this. It was not by our hardness of heart that they were compelled to go away. It was my carelessness and laziness—I ought to have got up earlier.'

'It was fate. Everything was against them.'

'They have been looked for in the British Museum where the girls went sometimes in search of copying work. But they have not appeared there once. None of the Museum people have seen them. We have inquired about them in every likely place, but there has been no sign.'

'In the streets—think of it!—friendless and penniless!' Tom repeated.

'Yes—say it again, so that when you find her, you will rejoice the more. Mr. Addison'—she laid her hand on his—'I am an old woman now, and I have seen a great deal—my sister and I together—of trouble and privation. We, too, have been reduced to walk the streets all night for want of a bed and to go hungry for want of food. Yet we were never utterly forsaken. Your Katie is not quite friendless. The GOD who rescued you from the Arabs will save her from the Devils—who destroy soul as well as body—of the street! Have faith, young man. Lift up your heart—oh! lift up your heart unto the Lord!'

This language is not so common as it used to be, and is seldom

used for the comfort and solace of a London Journalist, who may chronicle the emotions of religion, but is not often expected to feel them. Yet the words and this gentlewoman's sweet voice and her steady eyes so full of faith, fell upon his soul like rain on a thirsty soil.

'The other girl,' she went on, 'was of a different nature—she was less patient than Katie: she cried out and complained of the bitterness of her lot: she was without hope, though she was so young: the future was always dark to her. I tremble for Lily: but for Katie I have more than hope, I have confidence.'

'Yet she has never been here to see you since her departure.' And that is over two months ago and more.'

'No; I cannot understand why she has not come. But patience. You have yourself been rescued in a manner so miraculous that you may hope that a lesser miracle may have been wrought for Katie. When I think of ourselves everything seems possible. We were getting old—too old for teaching where they prefer young and active girls—and we were resolving that we would soon give up trying and go into the workhouse——'

'What? Had you, too, no friends?'

'We had cousins. Do you know that it is sometimes better to become a pauper than to accept the bread of grudging charity? Do not ask me about our cousins. Yet there was one whom we remember with gratitude. For he left us a legacy of sixteen hundred pounds in the Funds. It gives us fifty pounds a year. We lodge in this house; we have learned to live very cheaply on fruit and such things: we have each other's love, and we have kept our books. The winter of our days, believe me, is hallowed by such sunshine as never fell upon our spring. Think of us, young gentleman, when you tremble for the fate of Katie.'

Not a trace of the girls. Think how extremely difficult it is to effect a disappearance unless one has a trusty confederate. The face of every man and woman in the world is known to many; there are marks upon his person; his dress and speech and gait are all known to his friends; if he is 'wanted' by the police, there is always somebody who is ready to give information; landladies of lodgings, innkeepers, waiters—are all eager to get the reward. With what infinite trouble does a runaway murderer keep himself concealed for even a week! And yet here were two girls, advertised for, a large reward offered, their appearance described, their stature given, their dress when last seen, their names, and the probable nature of their occupation, and not a trace of

them to be found. Perhaps they had left the country. But they had no money. Or they might have gone into some secluded place. But it seemed impossible that there should be any place in Great Britain so secluded that no newspaper should reach it. And now the newspapers had taken up the matter and every day there were speculations, letters, suggestions, and advice poured into the columns. There are, it is true, many women who do not read papers. Domestic servants, as a rule, do not; many factory women do not; needlewomen, shirt-makers, match-makers, jam-makers, buttonhole-makers, and their kind do not; many shop-girls do not; there are artists who do not allow the serenity of their souls to be ruffled by the newspapers; there are young ladies whose minds are wholly occupied by their Things; there are actresses who care for only one column in the newspapers. Yet if these women do not, their employers, friends, lovers, and companions do. And all the world was talking about the two missing girls.

They had not been murdered, so far could be learned from the inquests and police offices; they might have been abducted—but this was a thing only whispered; they might have accepted some post abroad and gone off by steamer; they might . . . You may imagine a thousand possibilities. Murder, suicide, abduction—nothing was forgotten, nothing was left to the imagination. The advertisements went on; the reward was doubled; a hundred letters were received from people, hoping to get that reward, informing the advertisers of two girls recently arrived in the neighbourhood. And everybody now knew that the War Correspondent who had been reported killed, but turned up again unhurt after a few months of captivity, was engaged to one of the young ladies who were lost. And day after day the papers announced that no news had been heard of the missing pair.

It was unfortunate that they were advertised for together, because nobody had any suspicions at all about a single girl. It was the pair who were looked for, as if they were Siamese-twins or double-bodied Nightingales. Yet, as we know, they had been long since separated.

It was early in December that the first real discovery was made.

Dittmer Bock it was who made it by means of a favourite amusement of his, which was cheap, pleasant, and attainable every night even by the clerk on forty pounds a year. He used to go to the doors of a theatre at eleven o'clock and watch the ladies come out. Heavens! How beautiful they look, to the crowd of poor

young clerks, who gather about the doors to watch these Visions of another world! And how wonderful, how perfect, how stable, satisfying and complete does the world of Beauty, Wealth, and Ease seem to the young men whose desires are so catholic and comprehensive and whose possessions are so small! One evening Dittmer stood upon the kerb contemplating this procession of fair women, filling his soul with sweet images, and wondering what it would be like to be transported to the land where such creatures roam free and fearless—suddenly, to the surprise of the bystanders and the indignation of the policeman, he burst through the crowd and seized the hand of one of these Heavenly Visions.

'Lily!' he cried.

'You? Dittmer Bock?'

It was Lily. She was beautifully dressed, and she was on the arm of a gentleman. There was no more beautiful woman in the whole Theatre than Lily, this evening.

She ought to have been proud of her dress and her opera-cloak and the admiration of the whole house, and the brougham which awaited her, and everything.

But she snatched her hand away and blushed crimson.

'You, Dittmer Bock?'

'Who is it, Lily?' asked the gentleman with her.

'An old friend. One moment, Dittmer. Where is Katie? Don't tell her you have seen me.'

'I do not know where she is. We cannot find her. We are looking for her everywhere.'

'We were parted in the fog. I have not seen her since that night. It was in the fog. We tried to die together, Dittmer,' she whispered—'we did, indeed, but we were not allowed.'

'Come, Lily,' said the gentleman, 'we block the way.'

He pushed her gently into the carriage and drove away, taking no notice at all of the clerk.

Dittmer ran straight with the discovery to Tom, and was greatly astonished at the effect which the intelligence produced upon him.

This was the reason why the advertisements were discontinued.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE WORKROOM.

In an upper room, furnished with eight or ten sewing machines, there sat as many girls at work. The room was well ventilated and warmed: the girls looked contented: there was no talking,

but every girl sat over her sewing-machine and guided the work, while the needle jumped up and down in that most surprising and wonderful instrument. In a smaller room at the back a forewoman was at work.

Downstairs there was a showroom, quite a humble kind of showroom, in which one or two more sewing-machines were at work. And at the back of this was a small office, or sitting-room, in which there were two ladies conversing. One of them was the lady who ran this concern. It was conducted on Co-operative principles, which is the reason why it has since been closed, because of all things in this world there is nothing more difficult than to persuade people to buy things at Co-operative productive stores, that is to say, where the producers sell their things without the medium of boss, chief, bourgeois, or master. Why this is so, it is impossible to understand, seeing that there can be no doubt in the world, first, that all labour will, before long, work out its emancipation from the middleman, even the labour of those who write, and next, that there is no single argument that can be urged against Co-operative productive shops, especially those of women's work, except the fact that they always fail. And they always fail for two principal reasons: one being the astonishing hardness of heart which women display towards their working sisters, and the other the incompetency of the working women themselves.

This particular attempt was just then in the stage when a little feeble public interest in it had been excited by superhuman efforts of its friends, and success seemed possible, though there were many anxieties. The two ladies in the office were discussing these anxieties and possibilities. One of them, the manager of the concern, a lady no longer young, had spent her whole life among the working women. She had now arrived at the very unusual stage of knowing exactly, not only what they say about everything, but what they feel. Lady Bountiful, you see, hasn't the least idea of what these people feel about things. She brings along a concert of the Kyrle Society, and smiles around and feels good, and goes away with a farewell smile. Sometimes she brings along other things. But she never becomes one of the people. She is always outside them.

'My dear,' she said to the younger lady—it was the same young lady who had caught Katie on the bench as she was falling forward—'I really do think we have made a move.'

* * * * * *

The above stars represent quite a long conversation about linen

garments, and orders and expenses and receipts, from the Co-operative point of view, deeply interesting.

'And how do you get on with your hands?'

'There is the usual percentage of stupid girls, lazy girls, and incompetent girls. I know exactly what to expect. The most satisfactory of all is the girl you brought to me—Katie.'

'What is her full name?'

'I do not know—I have not yet asked her. She is quick to learn, obedient and ladylike.'

'Yes. She is ladylike, poor thing! Perhaps she was formerly a lady's-maid.'

'Poor thing!' the other echoed. 'Without friends and without relations. Left to die. Oh! what a fate!- What a punishment!'

'Yet her face is full of innocence and purity. Can such a face lie?'

'She said that she had no friends and no relations. What *can* that mean?'

'Let us go upstairs and see her.'

They went upstairs where Katie sat at work before a sewing-machine, quiet and industrious. She looked up and smiled as the ladies entered the room. The look, the smile, the very carriage of the head, were altogether different from the manner in which the other girls greeted the chief. These girls were all what we call decent and respectable: some of them were comely: some were even pretty, as London work-girls very often are, *petites*, with narrow sloping shoulders, small face and large eyes: some were country-bred, and showed it in their figures and the ample width of their shoulders: some had the manners of the shop: some, of the factory: some, of the London back street: some, of the slum: some, of the farm: some, of the servants' hall; none of them had the manners which were shown by so simple a thing as Katie's smile when she lifted her head.

She suffered no longer: she knew not, and had not the least suspicion, of the dreadful things that were thought and said about her by the ladies—yes, the very ladies—who had befriended her. She was in a haven of rest. She learned readily how to use the sewing machine: she even took some kind of interest in the work: she sat steadily working all day: she gained a sufficient weekly wage, and she had a room in a decent house recommended by the lady who ran the Co-operative Business. The other girls left her alone: she was a young lady who had somehow gone down the hill and got to their own level, and yet did not belong to them. All the day she

sat at work, but the hours were not long: in the evening she was free to go home and sit in her room and read, or to walk about. At first she sat in her room every evening, but she had now begun to walk about a little. She hoped for nothing: she expected nothing: she desired nothing, except to earn the means of paying for a roof and a resting-place, and food and clothes.

Not a healthy mood for so young a girl: but she had gone through so much suffering that rest was all she wanted. There are, in every person's life, times of suffering which are followed by times in which the exhausted brain sees things as in a dream, and men as trees, walking, and pays no heed to aught that passes. This was Katie's state. She paid no heed. She did not inquire or care what was said and thought about her: she did not try to explain how she had fallen into such a helpless condition: it never occurred to her, most fortunately, to ask what was thought of her.

The young lady, her rescuer, shook hands with her, though somewhat doubtfully—there are several ways of shaking hands, as everybody knows, and when a young lady shakes hands with a girl who has the manners of a lady, but has been picked up starving, and confesses to having no friends and no relations, a certain something—constraint, doubt, condescension, or encouragement—cannot but be remarked in the manner of extending or withdrawing the hand. Chapters—whole essays—great books—might be written on the differences, shades, and grades of shaking hands, from the affable greeting of a prince to the cheerful grasp which a workhouse chaplain bestows upon his sheep.

Katie, however, noticed nothing unusual in this welcome.

'You are quite strong and well again now, are you?' asked the young lady.

'Quite, thank you.'

'Are you still living in the same house?'

'Yes,' Katie replied, without interest in the matter. 'They are quiet people who leave me alone.'

'May I call upon you some day?'

'Certainly. Why not?'

'It must be on Sunday, after service. I shall not interrupt you then. My name is Katie, like yours—Katie Willoughby. You will tell me yours, perhaps, when I call at your lodgings. I should so much like,' she added in a lower voice, 'to be your friend, if you will let me.'

Katie made no reply. But her eyes fell upon the girl's dress.

There was a coloured scarf round her neck and a bit of bright colour in her hat and tan-coloured gloves.

'I thought,' she said, 'that you were in deep mourning. Was I dreaming? Sometimes a strange feeling comes over me, as if everything was a dream.'

'You are quite right. I was in deep mourning. But oh! Katie, on the very day that I found you, the most joyful news that ever reached any girl came to me: it told me that the—the person for whom I mourned was not dead at all, but living, and I put off my mourning.'

'Was it your lover?'

'Yes—it was my lover. Thank God, he was restored to those who love him.'

'Come on Sunday,' said Katie, suddenly interested. 'I will tell you of all my trouble, if you are not too happy to hear it.'

On Sunday morning Miss Willoughby called. But she could not hear the story that morning, because the girl lay in bed with some kind of fever. Her head and her hands were hot: her words were wandering. She spoke of the fog and of the night, and called upon Tom to come back and help her. But as for her story, she could not tell it, because reason and will and knowledge and self-rule had left her brain, which was the abode of delirium.

They carried her to the Hospital for Women in the Marylebone Road. There was nothing to show where she came from or who were her friends. In her pocket—girls no longer, except in books, carry treasures in their bosoms—lay tied together a packet of letters. They were from a man who signed himself 'Tom'—*tout court*—nothing but 'Tom,' and addressed her as Katie. What can be done with 'Tom'? This Tom was madly in love with her. He called her every endearing name that a fond lover can invent: he recalled the past days of happiness together: he looked forward to the future. He was in a railway train: he was on board a ship: he was among soldiers: he spoke of natives: he spoke of Arabs—clearly, therefore, a Tom among Egyptians. Probably a Tom who had been killed. He did not somehow write like an officer: his letters contained no news; for that he referred her to the papers: all he had to tell his girl was that he loved her—he loved her—he loved her—and was always and for ever her Tom.

The Sister of the ward read these sacred letters, and placed them, with a sigh that so much honest love should be lost, under Katie's pillow. Time enough to try and find out, if she grew worse, what had become of this Tom and who his Katie really was.

She did grow worse, but she had youth on her side and a good constitution, which had certainly not been spoiled by luxurious living or the want of exercise. She even lay at the point of death: had she died there would have been nothing to establish her identity, but those letters and her handkerchief marked 'K.R.C.' Then she would have been buried, and Lily's prophecy would have come partly true.

'She is better this morning,' said the Sister. 'Her head is cool. She has been sleeping a long time.'

'She is more beautiful than ever in her weakness.' It was Miss Willoughby who stood beside the bed with the Sister and the Nurse. 'Sister, think of it! She told me she was without friends or relations! Is it possible?'

'It is certainly not possible,' said the Sister. 'There is perfect innocence in her face and—more than that—in her talk. We hear the delirious talk of women whose lives have not been innocent and we learn their past. This girl's mind is as innocent as her face. You might make a painting of that and call it "Eve before the Fall," or "Una," or "Mary, the Sister of Martha." She may be friendless, but——' The Sister shook her head and went away.

Miss Willoughby sat by the bedside and waited.

'No friends and no relations.' How could a girl have neither friends nor relations? Yet to conclude that the girl deserved to have none was cruel and unjust. Miss Willoughby was ashamed of her hard thoughts. Besides, she had heard from the Sister about those letters.

Then Katie opened her eyes again, and looked as if she could speak.

'Do you know me now, dear?' asked Miss Willoughby.

'Yes, I know you.'

'You have been very ill. You are still weak. You must not talk much. But tell me your name.'

'Katharine Regina.'

'What?' Miss Willoughby started. 'How did you get that name?'

'It is my christian name.'

'What is your surname? What was your father's name?'

'Willoughby Capel.'

'Willoughby—Katharine Regina! It is very strange. Have you any relations named Willoughby?'

'I have no relations at all.'

Then she closed her eyes again.

'Leave her now,' said the Nurse. 'She is weak, and had better rest and go to sleep again.'

Next day Miss Willoughby called again, bringing grapes. Every grape upon the bunch was a big tear of repentance because she had thought so cruelly of her patient. Only the patient never knew. When one goes about a city a great deal and meets with many experiences, most of them of a truly dreadful kind, one naturally draws conclusions which would seem to many ladies most wicked. In the same way the doctor, when you tell him certain things, at once suspects the very worst. Katie never knew.

She was sitting up in bed, already in a fair way of recovery.

'Are you strong enough to talk to-day?' asked Miss Willoughby.

'Oh yes. I can talk to-day. But I have only just begun to understand all that you have done for me. I cannot thank you yet——'

'Do not talk of that at all.'

'You must have thought me most ungrateful when I was working at the sewing-machine. But all that time seems like a dream. I only half remember it. You were in mourning first, and then you put it off and you told me something.'

'I was—I was in the very deepest grief as well as the deepest mourning, for my lover was said to be dead—and now I am in the greatest joy and thankfulness because my lover has been miraculously restored to me. Ought I not to be happy?'

'I am so glad. My lover too is dead. But he can never be restored to me.'

'Your lover, dear? Oh! You had a lover too, and he was killed, like mine. Oh!'

She took her hand and pressed it.

'I know his name, because the Sister read his letters in order to find out who you were. His name was Tom.'

'Yes, it was Tom. And Tom is dead.'

'Will you tell me something more about yourself?' she asked. 'Not more than you want to tell. I am not curious indeed, but if I can help you . . . Oh! let me help you, because I met you on the very day that the telegram came which brought my lover back to life. In the evening when I went home—after I left you—they brought it to me. Oh! my dear—my sister brought it crying—my father kissed me—and my mother kissed me—and they were all crying and I knew not why—on the very same day when I found you. Can I ever think of that day without thinking of you, too? God has given you to me, so that I may deal with you as He has dealt with me. And I can never let you go away—never—never.'

'Oh!' said Katie, deeply moved. 'What can I say?'

'I shall never forget that day. Oh! how I rushed to tear off the black things and to . . . My dear, you are a part of that day. Now tell me more. You said your name was Katharine Regina. That is my name, too. There is always a Katharine Regina in the family. And I never heard of any other family which had those two names. And your father's name was Willoughby Capel. It is so very odd that I have been thinking about it all night. Tell me more, dear. You said you had no relations.'

'No—I know of none. My father would not speak of his relations. I have sometimes thought that they quarrelled with him. He was once, I know, in the army with the rank of Captain, and he had an annuity or allowance, but I do not know who paid it or anything else at all about him.'

'What a strange story!'

'The annuity was not a very large one, and I had to give lessons. I was governess to a lady—oh! not a very grand person—whose husband was a clerk in the city. I went there every morning at nine and came home at five. She was a good woman and kind to me—I was more a companion and a nursery governess than anything else.'

'Well, dear?'

'My father died suddenly at the beginning of this year. But I was engaged by this time, and as I had Tom I was happy and full of confidence. I went to live at Harley House—a place where governesses can live cheaply.'

'I know the place. Sister, what did you say about her face? You were quite right. Go on, dear—I know Harley House.'

'Then a very curious thing happened. Tom's uncle died and left him all his money, and for a week we were rich. But a solicitor—Tom's cousin—discovered that all the money belonged to somebody else. So we were poor again, and Tom went out to Egypt.'

'To Egypt?'

'Yes: he was a War Correspondent.'

'Oh! Katie—Katie'—Miss Willoughby caught her hand—'tell me—tell me—what was his name?'

'His name was Addison.'

Upon this, the young lady behaved in a very surprising manner indeed. For instead of saying 'Oh!' or 'Dear me!' or 'How very interesting!' she covered her face with her hands, and Katie saw that she was crying.

'What is the matter? Why are you crying?'

'I am crying, my dear—oh, my dear, what am I crying for? It

is because you are getting better. Go on, dear, I won't cry any more. Go on—Tom was his name, wasn't it? Poor Tom! Tom Addison, and he went out as War Correspondent and was killed by the Arabs at Suakim with an officer, Captain McLauchlin—but their bodies were never recovered, were they? Poor Tom Addison! Poor Captain McLauchlin! Poor girls who loved them at home in England!'

'Do you know all about it?'

'My dear, it was in the papers—but not your name. The world is never told more than a quarter of the truth. And none of the papers said a word about Katharine Regina.'

'Yes—he was killed, and then—oh! what did anything matter? In the middle of my trouble Mr. Emptage came home one day and said his salary was cut down from three hundred a year to a hundred and fifty. They couldn't afford to keep me any longer. So I had to look for another place. There are thousands of girls—ladies—looking for work everywhere. Oh! it is a miserable world for them. Thousands of girls—you cannot imagine, until you go about looking for work, how many there are—thousands breaking their hearts in trying to get work, and some of them starving because they cannot get any. I was one—and I had nothing left at all, and I spent two nights walking up and down the streets without a home, and on the second night I lost my only friend in the terrible fog. When you found me I had just learned that the Emptages had left Doughty Street and gone away—I knew not where. And then I think I must have broken down.'

'And then I found you. Oh! I found you.'

At this point the Sister appeared again.

'Not too much excitement, Miss Willoughby,' she said. 'Hasn't there been enough talk for to-day? Why, whatever is the matter?'

It was the young lady in fact, and not the patient, who was weeping.

'Yes, Sister—I will come again to-morrow. Enough talk for to-day. My dear, it was none other than the Hand of GOD Himself which led me to you that day. Oh! There are also many happy women in the world—oh! so many. See how miserable I was only a month ago, and now how happy and how grateful! The clouds will roll away from you too. I see them rolling away: there is nothing but blue sky and sunshine above, if only you could see them. Yes, Sister, I am coming. I talk too much always. I am coming. Kiss me, dear. Oh! kiss me and try to love me always, because we have had the same sorrow and may have . . . Yes, Sister, I am coming—I am coming.'

She hurried away, but Katie heard her talking and crying again outside the door. And she heard words—it was the Sister who said them—which had no meaning, so that she thought the old dreamy feeling was going to return.

'She must not be told yet: not until she is stronger. But let the poor man who wrote those letters be told at once.'

This was very remarkable. But the day was full of strange things. Presently the Secretary, who generally keeps downstairs all day and writes letters with tremendous energy, getting writer's cramp in no time, came into the Ward and made straight for Katie's bed and asked her if she was feeling stronger. As she asked the question her eyes filled, and she turned hastily away. Then the Sister came and placed the grapes handy for her and smoothed her pillows, and *her* eyes became humid too—fancy a hospital Sister, who sees so many sick people every day, giving way to the least resemblance of a tear! The thing was completed by the visit of the Senior Physician to the Hospital, who went her rounds in the afternoon and stood over Katie with eyes which were certainly misty.

When people are recovering from fever they are as sleepy as children and as incapable of asking questions of themselves. That is to say, they may ask those questions, but if there is no reply forthcoming they immediately cease to wonder why there is none. So that when Katie had said to herself, 'What mean these phenomena?' or words to that effect, and when she received no reply, she did not repeat the question, and she did not wonder in the least why there was no reply, and she fell fast asleep and slept like a young child, all round the clock, while in the beds round her some of the women tossed and turned unquiet, and some slept like herself, and some looked, with haggard eyes, for more torture, and some silently prayed that death might come to close the record. Always, in a Hospital, there is life returning and life departing: always may be heard the long and peaceful breathing of those who sleep while health returns, and the sighs of those who listen in the hushed watches of the night for the wings of Azrael.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SHATTERING OF THE CASTLE.

THE Rolfes sat at breakfast in the dining-room of their Russell Square house. That is to say, James Rolfe was taking breakfast, while his wife stood at the window looking into the garden, gloomy

with its black trunks and sooty evergreens, regardless of the cold. Her face was charged with clouds which betoken thunder and lightning.

'Harriet,' said her husband, turning round and looking at her, 'what's the good of it? What the devil is the good of carrying on like this?'

She made no reply.

'I say, Harriet, grumpiness doesn't help. You may sulk as much as you please, but you won't send Tom back to Egypt.'

'I can't bear it,' she cried, starting up and walking about the room. 'I won't bear it.'

'What will you do then, Harriet? You might as well declare that you won't bear a toothache. Because, my dear, bad temper never yet cured a toothache or changed a man's luck.'

'Oh! you deceived me—you deceived me.'

'No, Harriet, no,' he replied calmly. 'I did not deceive you. Do sit down and have breakfast comfortably. No, my dear. Don't let us call things by bad names. I only kept back certain facts.'

'You told me nothing about the trust-money.'

'I did not.'

'You told me nothing about the girl. The money was hers, and you knew it, and you saw she was in trouble, and you let her go without telling her. Oh! Jem, you are a villain! Something dreadful ought to happen to you.'

'Don't be a fool, Harriet. Tom was dead—a dead man ought not to be permitted to rise again in this manner—not a soul knew about this Trust except myself. I am perfectly certain that nobody knew. As for the girl, she didn't know, so she expected nothing, and therefore was not disappointed nor any the worse. If I had told you, why, at the very first flare up, you would have let it all out. I know you too well, my dear: much too well.'

'You deceived me—you have always deceived me,' she repeated with flashing eyes and a red spot on either cheek. 'But it's the last time. You shall never have the chance of deceiving me again.'

'Just as you like, Harriet. How long is the present rampage going to continue?'

'You have always deceived me from the beginning. Oh! what a fool I was to trust a word you said. I might have guessed what sort of a man you were from your companions. And now you want me to help in robbing your cousin. Yes—in robbing and stealing. Oh!'

'Call it what you like, Harriet.' But he reddened. 'I am not

going out of this job empty-handed, I promise you. Half of it ought to be mine, by rights. And what with the jewels and the silver mugs and the wine and the pictures and my bill of costs and all'—he emphasized his conjunctions so as to impress upon himself the power of arithmetic—'I intend to come pretty well out of it, Harriet.' He added a few words of more vigorous English with reference to Harriet's temper.

'Yes,' she replied, 'I know you will get a few hundred pounds, and you will spend it all in drink and racing and betting and billiards, and where shall we be afterwards? No, Jem, I am not going back to the old life. Don't think it. I shall go my own way.'

'You always have gone your own way, Harriet. But you are a fine woman and I'm proud to own you.'

'Own me?' She was not in the least mollified by the compliment to her appearance. 'You own me? I will show you how much you own me.'

'Proud to own you, my dear,' he repeated. 'A handsome creature, but the deuce and all in harness. Nasty tempered, stubborn, hard in the mouth, handy with her heels, skittish, and apt to shy. They're faults, Harriet, that take the value off the most perfect animal. And now shut up and have done with it, and don't worry me any more, or I may lose my temper too; and that would be bad for you. Sit quiet: do what I tell you without calling it ugly names: and I'll pull you through.'

She made some kind of inarticulate answer, and returned to the chair in the window, where she sat in silence. Her husband interpreting—poor mistaken creature!—silence for submission—who ever heard of a woman—and such a woman—submitting in silence?—chuckled, turned to the table and proceeded with his breakfast and his morning paper.

The door-bell rang loud and long. Harriet started in her chair, turned red and pale in turn, and glanced quickly at her husband. He paid no attention to a ring at the street-door—why should he?—and folded his paper so as to get at the sporting news.

But he jumped to his feet when Tom Addison appeared.

'Tom! my dear boy!' He seized Tom's hand with effusion. 'You are unexpected: but the earlier the better. You can't come too early. Besides, this is your own house. Let me introduce you to my wife, whom you have never seen before. Strange, isn't it, between cousins?' He was winking rapidly with both eyes. 'Harriet has been longing to make your acquaintance, and to tell you of the joy and gratitude which she felt when you were reported safe. Nothing ever affected her with so much happiness.'

'That's a falsehood, James,' said his wife quietly.

James turned pale and winked again with both eyes.

'That is my husband's falsehood, Mr. Addison,' she repeated. 'I was not glad or grateful to hear it. I was very sorry, though I did not swear about it or use the awful language that James did. We were both horribly sorry, Mr. Addison. Nobody could be more sorry and miserable than we were when the news came. It was a most dreadful blow to us. It brought back upon us the ruin which your death had averted. Don't be deceived. I did not want to make your acquaintance at all. And you have no worse enemy in the world than my husband.'

'Go on, Harriet—go on. Make as much mischief as you can.'

'He deceived me. He told me that your death was the luckiest thing in the world, because it gave us all the property. He never told me anything about the girl or the trust-money, because he meant to keep it all to himself.'

'Oh!' Tom cried.

'Wait a bit,' said his cousin. 'Let her run on.'

''He meant to keep it for himself, because he said that nobody knew of it but you and him, and he should be a fool to part with it. He was a thief from the day when you were killed.'

'I'll be even with you for this, Harriet,' her husband murmured.

'Then he found out who the real owner of that money was. Tom, it was your sweetheart—Miss Capel. He never told me that either. And when she came to his office, poor and in misery, he never told her—though he knew that all this money was hers—nor offered to help her, and let her go as she came—starving and in rags.'

'What? Is this true?'

'Wait a bit,' Jem replied huskily.

'Now that you have returned, he is going to pretend to find out who ought to have the money and to win your confidence by telling you.'

'Harriet—you're a devil. She's put out this morning, Tom. We've had a row. She doesn't know what she is saying. As for the Trust, I told you about it long ago, and you yourself told me that Miss Capel is the heiress.'

Tom turned to Harriet.

'Have you anything more to tell me? You wrote to me that if I would call this morning, your husband and you had many things of importance to communicate. As for Katie's inheritance, I know it already. Whether he knew before I told him——'

'He did know before you told him. He told me about it before you came home.'

'Go on, Harriet. I suppose you will come to an end some time,' said her husband, sitting down. 'I shan't interrupt you any more.'

Harriet went out of the room and returned with a bag, which she placed upon the table.

'There are your aunt's jewels, Mr. Addison. My husband made me pack them up in a bag. He was going to take them away and sell them. He said that you would never miss them, and that they were worth a pile of money.'

Her husband said nothing, but drummed upon the table with his nails.

'He has taken down half the pictures in the house and is going to cart them away. He says you won't miss them. You will find them stacked all ready in the hall.'

'Go on,' said Tom. 'Is there any more?'

Harriet opened the doors of the sideboard, which was an old-fashioned thing with a cupboard in the middle. It was full of Uncle Joseph's old silver—his collection of mugs and cups, spoons, bowls, and ladles—a collection worth any amount of money.

'He has put all the old silver here ready to be taken away. He was going to take it away this evening in a cab.'

Tom groaned. 'Is there much more?'

'No. There is your uncle's wine-cellar. We've been drinking the wine ever since we came, and he means to carry away all the rest. He says you will never know that there was a cellar full, and he will either drink it himself or sell it.'

'Go on, my angel,' said her husband.

'There is nothing more to tell, Mr. Addison. Now you know what kind of cousin you've got. Let him deny it who can.'

'Why do you tell me all this?' asked Tom.

'Because she's had a quarrel with her husband,' said Jem, who, as the lady's husband, ought to have known. 'When she's in a rage, she says anything.'

'I tell you all this partly to punish him for his deceptions, and because I am not going to prison for his sake, and because I am not going back to the old life. He deceived me when he took me from my stall and swore he was a rich man: he had no money left; and though he had an office, there was no business. He deceived me again about this money: and at last, he wants me to join him in stealing and robbing. And that completes the job. I am going

to leave him, Mr. Addison. I shall put on my bonnet and go away at once. James,' she said with a hard laugh, 'I have saved you from a crime. You ought to be thankful to me some day. Besides, you have got rid of me. Why, if you had not taken me from my stall on pretence of being a rich man, you might have been spared all this temptation. Mr. Addison, I have told you the truth and the exact truth. I am truly sorry that the young lady has been kept out of her rights, and I am, oh! ever so sorry you ever came home again, and I don't pretend to be glad. What a dreadful thing it would be for the world if many dead men became alive again! When James has got plenty of money and isn't worried he doesn't get drunk, and he stays at home and lays himself out to be a good husband and to please his wife. When he's got no money he is tempted to do wicked things and carries on shameful. That's the chief reason why I am sorry you are alive. Now I've told you, I will leave you to settle with him by yourself.'

She turned to her husband as if loth to leave him and yet resolved.

'Find another wife, Jem,' she said. 'You can always catch a shop-girl by pretending to be rich.'

Her husband growled.

'Good-bye then, Jem,' she said. 'You will now have nobody to keep but yourself, unless you find a wife. Living alone ought not to cost much, I should think. Perhaps you will be able to keep honest.'

He winked hard and made as if he would speak. But no words came. Then she left the room with a little bow to Tom, and as much dignity as she could assume. The two men were left alone.

It was an embarrassing situation. These two men had met as friends a quarter of an hour before; one of them firmly trusted the other. And now . . .

'Harriet has made up a very fine collection of lies,' said Jem with a whole series of tight winks, and an attempt at a light and cheery manner. 'When she's in a wax there's nowhere a finer stringer of big ones'—he glanced furtively at his cousin, who stood meditating, his hand on the bag containing the jewels. 'Now I assure you I had no more notion of what she was going to make up this time than you yourself. Ran them off fine and fluent, didn't she? In half an hour's time she will be crying on my neck. Poor Harriet! It is her infirmity. Poor Harriet! And as for these lies, the less we discuss them the better. They're too absurd to be mischievous.'

'How came the jewels in the bag?'

'She put 'em there herself. I know nothing about them.'

'How did she get the key of the safe?'

'I gave it her. Why, when you were dead, I thought the jewels and everything else were mine. I gave her the jewels for herself. She only put them into the bag to make up a story.'

'Yet you promised—you promised solemnly—that if anything remained over after the trust-money was paid you would give it to Katie.'

'That was when we thought there would be barely enough in that Trust. You could not expect——'

'Go on.'

'Well—I gave her the key of the safe where the jewels were lying. That is all I have to explain.'

'Then there is the old silver. I suppose you know that my uncle's collection of silver is worth a great deal.'

'I gave it all to my wife as well. I didn't want old silver. Women like those things. I gave it all to her—not to sell, of course. She wouldn't have sold it. What does she do? Pack it up in this sideboard and pretend I put it there.'

'Then there are the pictures. I noticed a whole stack of them in the hall.'

'I suppose she put them there herself. By the Lord! Tom, it's as neat a put up thing as I ever saw.'

'As for the wine now——'

'Oh! as for the wine, I drank it regularly till you came home. Why not?'

'Jem—there's some law about inheritance. Were you entitled to all these things? I have other cousins, you know, by my mother's side. They are in New Zealand, to be sure, but still——'

'Well,'—Jem looked embarrassed, and he winked hard—'I can make all that clear to you. But it's a long story. I can't explain the law of inheritance in five minutes. When we have a quiet quarter of an hour together——'

'Ye—yes,' said Tom. 'Your wife's revelations have made me see things more clearly. My return must have disgusted you more than enough, and I ought to have understood it. I forgot that altogether. Well, you had better, I think, let me take possession at once of my own house, if it is mine—or temporary care of it, if it is not mine, with these valuable things. Please make out a statement of the whole Estate with its liabilities by—say—by to-morrow. Can you do that? Shall I send in accountants to help you?'

'I must say,' Jem began, 'that your suspicions——'

'I do not allow myself to have any suspicions. As for most of what your wife alleged, I shall never make any further inquiries. But until I hear from—from Katie's own lips—if ever we find her—the truth about her interview with you—whether she revealed her destitute condition to you or not—I can have no dealings with you.'

'I suppose,' said Jem, 'that I may make out my bill of costs.'

'Certainly. Oh! Jem, if you had acted well by that poor girl—if you had behaved with common honesty and truth—there is nothing in the house that you might not have taken. Nothing of mine that you could not have had. Man! I would have made you rejoice and thank God that I returned.'

By this unfortunate and unexpected accident were Jem's hopes of getting something solid out of his uncle's estate wholly blasted. Who could have believed that Harriet would have rounded on him in such a way?

There is only one more chapter of this history to be written. And that is a short chapter. Let me therefore explain that Jem's after-conduct with regard to Uncle Joseph's estate was perfectly fair and upright. He sent in, the next day, a statement of the estate and the various securities, houses and lands, belonging to it. He also sent in his bill of costs, which was naturally heavy, not to say outrageous, and he wrote a letter couched in most dignified language, stating that after what had passed he should be pleased to be relieved of his functions in administering the property without the least delay.

This done, and having received a reply, and a cheque for the bill of costs, untaxed, he sent the whole of the papers to his cousin's new advisers, cashed the cheque, called a cab, and drove away.

He never came back. The two old clerks went on dozing and meditating; the boy slumbered and read penny novels and played at astragals in the office below, until Saturday, and then—there was no money, and no one to ask for it. They waited another week. The master came no more. And then they understood that their engagement had come to an end. The boy was the most grieved of the three, because, to him, the disaster meant that he would now have to find a place where he must work in earnest. The two old men, who had done their life's work, also looked for other places, but failed to get an engagement elsewhere. One of them had saved money, and he proceeded to buy himself an annuity, and is a most respectable old gentleman with strong opinions in

politics. The other, who had saved none, went into the Marylebone Workhouse, and is now one of those useful collegians who learn the rules by heart, and insist upon their being carried out to the letter, and complain to the Guardians continually.

Tom met his cousin a few months afterwards. He looked less like a serious solicitor than ever. Tom bore no malice—being now restored to happiness—and shook hands with him in cousinly fashion.

'And how are you doing?' he asked. 'Getting on with your profession?'

'No. I say, Tom, what that she-devil said was all true. I meant to have stuck to all the money when you were dead. You ought not to have come back. You were dead. You had had your funeral, so to speak—what would happen if dead men kept on coming back and upsetting things? When you came back, I saw that I should get nothing unless I helped myself. But I did hope that you would find the girl, and that we should arrange everything friendly.'

'I see,' said Tom. 'Well—it was ordered otherwise, as they say. And how is your wife?'

'She is singing at a Liverpool Music Hall. She went her way and I went mine. A fine woman, Tom, with a temper. I believe that Baronet fellow, Surennery, as they call him, put her on to it.'

'What is your way, Jem?'

Jem winked both eyes, and laughed.

'I am now a tipster, Tom. I send the name of the winner, you know—and the mugs send up their half-crowns by the dozen. Juggins, thank goodness, is everywhere. Oh! I'm doing pretty well. As for the Law, I always hated it. You're looking well and hearty, Tom. Good-bye—good-bye!'

CHAPTER THE LAST

LIFE AND LOVE.

EVERYBODY at the Hospital continued to show the most extraordinary interest and sympathy with Katie during her short convalescence. The Senior Physician spoke mysteriously of Joy as a great assistance in cases where the patient had been brought low by trouble: she also said that freedom from anxiety would be found an invaluable medicine: and that rest from every kind of work, with perhaps travel amid new scenes, would complete her cure. She said these ridiculous things just as if rest and ease and

travel were attainable, and within the reach of the poorest girl in all London. Then the Sister, a most sober-minded and practical person, free from all enthusiasms, agreed with the Senior Physician, and said that she was always right, as her patient would find. Then the Secretary used to sit by her bedside and whisper that, after all, there was no cure so good as Happiness. And so with everybody. The other patients were all in the same tale, and would tell her that she was a happy girl, and no one envied her, because she deserved all. 'Why, even when visitors came to see the other patients there used to be a great whispering, and the visitors would look at her curiously. Because, you see, by this time, all the world knew the story that I have written down, and there had been leading articles on Well-known and Historical Reappearances, in which the Claimant always furnished one illustration, and a certain Demetrius another, and Enoch Arden, Perkin Warbeck, Lambert Simnel, and one Martin never failed to lend their names.

Katie mended fast—and one afternoon her friend Miss Willoughby told her that the time had now come when she could leave the Hospital.

'And now, my dear,' she said, 'you are to have a surprise. Oh! what a lot of things I have to tell you! I heard yesterday what the Doctor—oh! she is a wise woman!—said about Joy. Yes, Joy is a beautiful medicine. Thank GOD, I know it in my own case. Now there is no luggage to pack up, is there?'

'I am the only girl in the world,' said Katie—'the only girl, I believe, who has got no luggage, no possessions, no money, no friends, and no relations.'

'Yes: which will make all that follows the more delightful. You may add, my dear, that you have got no clothes.'

'No clothes?'

'Why—you could not possibly go to the House of Joy in such poor shabby things as you had on when we brought you here.'

'But I am in mourning, you know——'

'My dear,'—she kissed her—'nobody knows it better than I do. Sometimes, however, we put off mourning—on joyful occasions—say, for weddings. It is my fancy, dear, that you put off mourning for this day. To-morrow—if you like—you may put it on again.'

Her new clothes were fitting for a young lady, being, in fact, much finer than anything the poor girl had ever worn in her life before, but Katie put them on without a word.

'Where have you brought me?' Katie looked about the room. They had come in a cab: it was five o'clock: outside it was dark already; they were in a room beautifully furnished with all sorts of pretty things in it: the lamp was lit, and on the table tea was standing in readiness.

'My dear, you must not ask too many questions, because I have got such a lot to tell you. Oh! how shall I ever begin? First, you shall have a cup of tea—and so will I—nothing in the world like a cup of tea. Formerly ladies drank small beer. Think of that! Is it sweet enough, dear? Oh! Katie—I am so happy to-night.' She stopped in her talk to kiss her. 'This is my own room—is it not a pretty room? And now I am going to give it up to my sister, because I am going to be married—you know that, don't you? My lover who was dead has come back to life again, and nothing will please him—the foolish boy!—but that I must marry him at once. Oh! if your lover could come back too! And I shall never have such a pretty room as this again, I am sure. But I shall have him instead. He was in Egypt, you know, like your boy—Tom—poor Tom Addison. My boy knew Tom Addison very well. He will talk to you about him if you like.' She stopped and kissed her again, and again the tears came into her eyes.

'Well, it was all in the papers, and I dare say you saw it. There was an expedition made, an attack, and the Egyptians ran away, and my boy was reported missing—just like yours. Yes, dear, we were sisters in misfortune—and we did not know it—that day when you fell fainting into my arms, and told me you were without friends and without relatives, and I was your cousin all the time.'

'Are you really my cousin?'

'That is one of the things I am going to explain to you, dear Katie. Oh! if Tom Addison had only come home with Harry McLauchlin.'

'McLauchlin! That is the name of the officer who was missing at the same time.'

'Yes—he was only a prisoner, and he escaped. If Tom had only escaped with him! Poor Katie! we lost our lovers together. Oh! if we could find them together!'

She stopped and listened. Outside there were voices.

She ran out of the room, and Katie heard her saying, earnestly: 'Not yet—oh! not yet—I implore you—not yet—wait till I call you.' Then she returned and shut the door carefully. 'Oh! I have such a lot to tell you. First of all, dear, you are my cousin.

Do you see this portrait?' It was a miniature representing an old lady, sweet of face and beautiful. 'That is your great-aunt—and mine—Katharine Regina Willoughby. Your name is the same, and so is mine.'

'But my name is Capel.'

'Nothing of the kind, my dear. Your father called himself Capel because he quarrelled with his relations—and—and refused to speak to them any more, you know.' This was a kind way of putting it, and the male members of the family reversed this statement.

'But his real name was Willoughby. Here is a portrait of him in uniform when he was in the army—there it is.' She brought a water-colour portrait showing a very gallant young hero in scarlet. 'Tis a colour which sets off the fire and masterfulness of the hero in his youth.

'Oh! it is my father,' cried Katie, 'though I cannot remember him so young as this. But he kept his good looks to the last.'

'Yes—it is your father. It is all proved now without the least doubt, Katie.' She lowered her voice as one does when one is going to say a disagreeable thing. 'We will not talk much about him because he—he had his faults, I am afraid. But you should keep this likeness. He was Miss Willoughby's favourite nephew: she gave him quantities of money: she forgave him all his extravagances: she even placed a large sum in the hands of Mr. Joseph Addison, her solicitor, so that he might enjoy an annuity of £300 a year, which was paid him regularly.'

'Oh! In Mr. Addison's hands? Tom's Uncle Joseph?'

'Yes—after his death the principal was to be given to her niece—to you, my dear.'

'To me?'

'Yes, to you. That Trust, the discovery of which sent Tom to Egypt, was yours, Katie. Oh! if you had only known it! And I am very much afraid that Mr. Rolfe, who seems to have been a person of no morals at all, was actually going to cheat you out of it. It is all yours, Katie: you are—not rich perhaps—but you have plenty. My dear, if Tom had only escaped with Harry!'

'Oh! but how did you find out all this? Is it really true?'

'You have lots of friends, Katie—quantities of friends. There are both friends and relations waiting for you. To think that I did not know, and took you to the Co-operative Work Girls! But never mind. And now I am going to bring in some of your friends.' She rang the bell, and the door was opened with a promptitude

which proved that the man—it was a man—must have been lurking outside in readiness.'

'Katie,' said the other Katie, 'this is Harry McLauchlin—my Harry—who was in captivity among the Arabs for six months with your Tom. Harry made his escape, you know. If Tom could only have escaped with him!'

The escaped prisoner, who showed no traces of his long captivity, bowed and took her hand, but said nothing and looked embarrassed.

'It is like a dream to me,' said Katie; 'I cannot understand. You were a prisoner with Tom—you were present when he—was killed?'

'Harry will tell you all if you please to ask him to-morrow; not to-day, dear. He will tell you how it fared with them in their long captivity. But perhaps you will hear from another source.'

'Miss Willoughby,' said Captain McLauchlin, recovering from his confusion, 'we found out—Tom and I—in the talks which we had at night, all about each other. We guessed that you could be none other than the daughter of Harry Willoughby.'

'Did Tom send me no message when you escaped? None at all?'

'None,' said the Captain.

'Captain McLauchlin, tell me'—she caught his hand—'oh! tell me, once for all, how he died?'

'Not now—not now. Ask me, if you like, to-morrow.'

'Did he suffer? Was he murdered while he tried to escape with you?'

'He was not murdered, but he suffered—well, he suffered about as much as I did. We had a bad time of it, Miss Willoughby. He helped me to bear it.'

'Ask him no more questions, dear,' said her cousin. 'To-morrow, as many as you please. There is another friend who wants to see you.'

The Captain stepped aside and the other friend came in.

It was Mrs. Emptage—and how she carried on, with what teas and congratulations—yet she would not explain the thing that made her so glad; and how she lamented the fallen family fortunes and the interrupted education of her daughters on the one hand, and how she rejoiced over Katie's happiness and good fortune on the other, cannot be expressed. She spoke of her happiness as of a thing which left nothing at all to be desired.

'I am happy,' said Katie, greatly wondering, 'because I have found kindness and friends. But—oh! Mrs. Emptage—I have lost Tom.'

Mrs. Emptage nodded and laughed, and nodded again in a bewildering manner. Then she stood aside. It seemed as if everything was arranged beforehand and as if everybody knew his part.

The next visitor was no other than Miss Beatrice Aspey. She came dressed in her poor old black stuff frock. Nobody could be shabbier. The sight of her recalled the days of anxiety and the circle of poor and struggling gentlewomen and the voice of the Consoler. Katie sprang up to meet her.

'My dear,' said Miss Beatrice—if she was shabby, no one could be sweeter, gentler, or more consoling—'did I not say that in the darkest moment and the most unexpected manner, God Himself opens a way? I have learned all—I know more than you—yes—but of your sufferings you will learn a thousand lessons of charity and love for others. You are rich, my dear, I hear, and happy. Do not forget us. You will find changes. Miss Stidolph has gone to the workhouse. I go to see her sometimes. And Miss Grant, who worked so hard every night, is dead. She had been married, my dear, and nobody knew it, to a wretched man, and she had a boy for whom she worked so hard. Others have gone and new ones come. We are all as poor, and we are all as struggling. Do not forget the poor gentlewomen—oh! the poor gentlewomen—who have no friends but their Lord in Heaven!'

'How could I ever forget them? But oh! Miss Beatrice, where is Lily?'

Miss Beatrice dropped her eyes.

'I do not know—we have heard something, it is true. But I do not know, indeed, where to look for her—or what she is doing. My dear, you must be very humble and thank God for things of which you know not, as well as for things of which you know.'

So they kissed, and she too stood aside. There are not many ladies left who still keep to the old faith and use the old language, and fear nothing because they live in a sure and certain hope.

Then there appeared—none other than Dittmer Bock!

At the sight of Katie he burst into unfeigned weeping and sobbing, and fell on his knees.

'Ach! Himmel!' he cried. 'It was my fault. I ought never to have left you alone. I was a Dumm Kopf. I lost my way in the fog. And it was midnight when I got back to the Park, and you were gone—you were gone. Kätchen, can you forgive me? All your sufferings were my fault—mine. But they are all over now that——' He stopped and choked.

She gave him her hand, which he kissed, and got up still penitent.

'You did your best, Dittmer. Do not reproach yourself. Can I ever forget that you were the only friend we had in the world—Lily and I—before we all lost each other. Where is Lily?'

Dittmer stammered. 'I—I—I—do not know,' he said, 'I seek her still.'

'We *must* find her, Dittmer. Do not let us lose sight of each other again. You must have so much to tell me after all these weeks.'

'Ach! I must no more call you Kätchen but Fraülein Willoughby—and you will no more listen to me, because——' He stopped and looked confused. 'But you will be happy. What matter if all the world were bankrupt so that you are happy? It is true that my salary which was forty pounds a year is now sixty: I should have had thirty pounds a year *to help you with, because* I could live easily on thirty pounds a year.' He sighed as if he had lost a beautiful chance. 'I must not grumble. Your happiness is worth more than thirty pounds a year. It is true also that I have nearly completed a project which would give, I am sure, another Godefroi to Hamburg if I could be helped by your sympathy.'

'You will always have that, Dittmer.'

'No: you can no longer listen to my plans. What are ambitions without a sympathetic friend?'

'Why not, Dittmer? Did we not agree that I was always to be your sister? What has happened to destroy that agreement?'

'You are rich: you have many friends: you will have also——' He stopped because the other Miss Willoughby shook her finger. 'Ya—I gombrehend. I say nichts. I search for my island in the Pacific Ocean, like Herr Godefroi.'

'Herr Bock!'—it was the other Katie—'you can have no more time. Now go—all of you—because there is still one other friend. . . .'

'My dear,' she said, when they were alone, 'does joy kill? Are you strong enough to bear the greatest surprise of all? Everything has been restored to you. Your name, which your father concealed: your fortune, which a dishonest lawyer wished to rob and—and—oh! Katie—we are happy together. Heaven gave you to me on the day when my love came back to life—I give you back to Tom—not killed, but escaped—and at home again and well—waiting for you—waiting for you, my dear. . . .'

One shall be taken and another left. Where is the woman who was left? Alas! they have not yet found her, though Dittmer

seeks her continually. Perhaps in the future, far or near, the happy woman who was taken may be permitted to bring the solace of love that endureth beyond shame unto the hapless woman who was left. So mote it be!

They were married from Harley House, so that the girls who have to seek continually for work and have never any joy in their lives, or rest, or love, and never get enough of anything, have now something sweet and pleasant to remember and to tell. Once, the story now goes, there was a girl in Harley House—actually in Harley House, where no male visitors are allowed on any pretence, and all the girls go loverless—who had a lover of her own. But he was killed. Then she lost her work and could find no more, and became so poor that she had to leave even Harley House—where one can live so cheaply—actually, she could not find the money for Harley House—and went forth to wander penniless, and she met with many remarkable adventures and nearly perished of want and cold. But lo! Her lover was not dead after all, and he came back and found her, after many days, and they were married from Harley House by express permission of the Committee, and they now live together happy for ever and for ever in this world and the next. There is no other Institution or Home or Asylum or Retreat or Hostel for young gentlewomen who maintain themselves by art, literature, music, teaching, copying, or keeping books, in which there exists so bright and beautiful a memory. It lights up all the House. The residents tell newcomers about it, just as the nuns of Whitby Abbey used to exult over the story of St. Hilda and her miracles. The history gives them hope: Katie is an Exemplar: what has happened to her may happen in like manner to themselves. Very likely it will, because they are invited to the house in Russell Square which this happy pair have now converted into a Garden of Eden—but there are no apple-trees in the Square Garden. There they meet young men who have the true feeling for the sex, and call that man churl and nidderling and pitiful sneak and cur, who would suffer any young woman whom he loves to work if he could order otherwise. All women who have to work for their bread confess and declare that the chief happiness, the joy, the crown of love, is to sit down and let a man work for them and pour into their ample laps the harvest of his labour—the fruit and corn and wine; the golden guineas; the name and fame—oh! ye Gods! the name and fame!—to administrate; and receive and distribute and provide. Merciful

Heaven! Send quickly to Harley House, in spite of the rules, as many strong-armed lads as there are lasses fit for them, so that every poor young gentlewoman may find a man who will believe her beautiful and best and will worship her, and set her in a chair with the household linen in her lap and a few friends by her side for afternoon tea, while, out of doors, he cheerfully mops his streaming brow and makes the splinters fly!

SELF OR BEARER

CHAPTER I.

ON A VERSE OF VIRGIL.

When Virgil represented the souls of infants as lying all together in a cold and comfortless place outside the gates of Tartarus—why not outside the gates of the Elysian Fields, where the air is finer and the temperature more moderate ?—he certainly had in his mind the Roman Hospital for Children, the ruins of which may still be seen on Mount Aventine, close to the ancient Porta Navalis, where the population was thickest, the houses tallest, the streets narrowest, the street-cries loudest, the rumbling of the carts noisiest, the smell of onions, oil, and vinegar the most profound, the retail of tunny-fish on the largest scale, and where the population consisted of porters, sailors, riverside men, gladiators, and loafers. It was a very good Hospital. The wards were spacious and lofty ; there was a garden, where vegetables, and flowers, and fruit were grown, and there was always plenty of fresh air. The provisions were abundant ; the Sisters who nursed the children were mostly young, and generally, therefore, pretty. They dressed in white, simply but gracefully, in respectful, distant imitation of the Vestal Virgins. It was their custom to speak with admiration of the celibate life, though the young doctors and clinical clerks always fell in love with them, and they sometimes went away, and left their Hospital children to be married. Then, in due course, they were able to set up a little Children's Hospital of their own at home. The Senior Physicians were grave and reverend persons, who knew to the tenth part of a drachm how much powder of kittiwake's brains would cure infantine colic, and how snail-broth should be infused with a

certain herb, found only on the Campagna, in order to subdue a quartan fever or ague. The younger doctors were zealous and active—too fond, perhaps, of trying experiments, but devoted to science, and always on the look-out for new specifics. It was a great school of medicine, and the students were notorious in the Quarter for their singing, drinking, dancing, gambling, fighting, lovemaking, tavern-haunting, street-bawling, ruffling, roystering, fanfaronade, and gaillardise.

Yet, with all these advantages, the Romans did not understand quite so well as we of later and, in other respects, degenerate age, how to keep the little fluttering spark of life in existence; nor were they so skilful in reading the signs of disease, nor had they so many appliances at hand for relieving the little sufferers. Therefore, there was, in the old Roman Hospital, a continual wailing of the children.

Now, had Virgil visited the Children's Hospital at Shadwell, which was founded, unfortunately, after his time, he would have re-written those lines. He would have represented the souls of those innocents lying all in rows, side by side, in comfortable cots, enjoying a mild air with no draughts, and Sisters always present with thermometers to regulate the temperature, and an endless supply of bottles and milk. The infant souls would be perfectly happy, just as they are at Shadwell; there would be no wailing at all. Sometimes they would sleep for four-and-twenty hours on end; sometimes they would be sucking their thumbs; sometimes they would be sucking the bottle; at other times they would be kicking fat and lusty legs, or they would be propped up by pillows, looking straight before them with the indifference absolute to outside things and the perfect self-absorption possible only to infants, mathematicians, and fakeers, their eyes full of the calm, philosophic wisdom which belongs to Babies. One considers this wisdom with mingled pity and envy. Is it a memory or an anticipation? Does it belong to the past or to the future? Is the child remembering the mysterious and unknown past before the soul entered the body, or does it think of what is to come when the earthly pilgrimage is finished? Another theory is that one is born wise, but, owing to some defect in our nursing, one forgets all the wisdom in the first year, and only recovers a few fragments afterwards. Now, whether they are sleeping or waking, the souls of the infants are, one is perfectly convinced, always happy, and always watched over by certain pale-faced, beautiful creatures dressed in long white aprons and white caps, with grave and thoughtful faces, who have no inde-

pendent existence of their own, nor any thoughts, hopes, desires, or ambitions, but are contented to minister for ever to Baby, mystic and wonderful.

One is sorry that Virgil never had a chance of seeing the Shadwell Hospital, not only because he would have written certain lines differently, but because the place would certainly have inspired him with a line at least of illustration or comparison. There are Babies in it by the score, and every Baby is given to understand on entering the establishment that he is not to cry; that he will not, in fact, want to cry, because all his necessities will be anticipated, and all his pains removed. At home he has been told the same thing, but has never believed it, which is the reason why he has so often sent his father off to work with a headache worse than the Sunday morning skull-splitter—reminiscence of a thirsty night—and why he has every morning reduced his mother to the similitude of a thread-paper, and kept the whole court awake, and become a terror to the High Street outside the court. Here he cries no longer, and gives no one a headache, but is considerate, and good-tempered, and contented.

The Babies are ranged along the sides of the room in cots, but some are laid in cradles before the open fireplace, and some are placed on top of the stove, like a French dish laid to stew in a Bain-Marie, and some have spray playing upon their faces and down their throats; some are sleeping, some are sucking the bottle, and some are lying broad awake, their grave eyes staring straight before them, as if nothing that goes on outside the crib has the least interest for a Baby. Here and there sits a mother, her child in her lap; but there are not many mothers present, and about the ward all day and all night perpetually hovers the Sister. When one first visits this room, there happens a curious dimness to the eyes with a choking at the throat for thinking of the innocents suffering for the sins of their fathers and the ignorance of their mothers. Presently this feeling passes away, because one perceives that they do not suffer, and one remembers how good it must be for them to be in such a room with pure air, neither too hot nor too cold, with the Sister's careful hands to nurse them, and, for the first time in their young lives, a holy calm around them. To the elder children in the Ward above, the quiet, the gentle ways, the tender hands, and the kindly words, are full of lessons which they will never forget. Why not for the infants, too?

The Sister in this Ward wore a gray woollen dress with a white apron, which covered the whole front of her dress, a 'bib apron,' a

white collar, and a white cap and no cuffs, because cuffs interfere with turning up the sleeves. She was young, but grave of face, with sweet, solemn eyes, and yet a quickly-moved mouth which looked as if it could laugh on small provocation, were it not that her occupation made laughing almost impossible, because Babies have no sense of humour. Her name, in the world, was Calista Cronan, and she was the daughter of Dr. Hyacinth Cronan, of Camden Town. As for her age, she was twenty-two, and as for her figure, her stature, her beauty, and her grace, that, dear reader, matters nothing to you, because she is the next thing to a nun, and we all know that a nun's charms must never be talked about.

It was a Sunday morning—a morning in early June—when outside there was a divine silence, and even the noisy highway of the Thames was almost quiet. The Sister was loitering round the cribs in her ward, all the Babies having been looked after, washed, put into clean things, and made comfortable for the morning. Two or three mothers—but not many, because there are household duties for the Sunday morning—were sitting with their own Babies in their laps, a thing which did not interfere with Sister Calista's catholic and universal maternity. Everything in the ward was as it should be: the temperature exactly right, the ventilation perfect, the cases satisfactory. Presently the door opened and a young man came in. As he carried no hat and began to walk about the cribs and cradles as if they belonged to him, and as the Sister went to meet him and talked earnestly with him over each baby, and as he had an air of business and duty, it is fair to suppose that this young gentleman was connected with the Medical Staff. He was, in fact, the Resident Medical Officer, and his name was Hugh Aquila.

Mr. Hugh Aquila had passed through his Hospital Course and taken his Medical Degrees with as much credit as is possible for any young man of his age. Merely to belong to the Profession should have been happiness enough for him, who had dreamed all his life of medical science as the one thing, of all things, worthy of a man's intellect and ambition. There are, in fact, other things equally worthy, but as Hugh was going to be Medicinæ Doctor, it was good for him to believe, while he was young, that there was nothing else. So the young limner believes that there is nothing to worship and follow but his kind of art; and the physicist considers himself as the Professor of the One Thing Noble and Necessary—all in capitals. But the fates are unequal, and one man's cup brims over while another's is empty. To this fortunate young

man Love had been given as well as the Profession which he desired, and a measure of success and reputation—Love, which so often is kept by Fortune for Consolation Cup, and bestowed upon those who have lost the race and been overthrown and trampled on in the arena, and have got neither laurels nor praise, nor any wreath of victory, nor any golden apples. Yet this young fellow had actually and already obtained the gift of love—though he was as yet no more than five-and-twenty—in addition to his other gifts, graces, and prizes. Perhaps it does not seem a very great thing to be Resident Medical Officer in a Children's Hospital. But if you happen to be a young man wholly devoted to your Profession, and if you are already in good repute with your seniors, and if you have faith in yourself, and a firm belief in your own powers, and if, further, you see great possibilities in the position for study and increase of knowledge, then you will understand that to be Resident Medical Officer in the Children's Hospital at Shadwell may be a very great thing indeed.

When this Resident Medical had completed his round and finished the work which has every day to be begun again, he stood for a moment at a window looking out into the silent street below. It had been raining and the pavements were wet, but the sun was bright again, and there were light clouds chasing across the sky. Within and without everything was very quiet.

In the week there were noises all around them: the noise of steamers on the river, the noise of work in the London Docks, the murmurs of the multitudes in High Street, Brook Street, Cable Street, and St. George's-in-the-East. But to-day was Sunday morning, and everything was peaceful. The eyes of the young man, as he stood at the window, had a far-off look.

'You look tired, Hugh,' said the Sister.

These two were not brother and sister. They were not even, so far as they knew, cousins. Nor had they known each other from infancy. Yet they addressed each other by their Christian-names. To be sure Calista was, professionally, the Universal Sister. But Hugh was certainly not the Universal Brother. This singularity might have given rise to surmise and gossip in the Ward, but for the fact that the Babies took no more notice of it than if it had never occurred at all—it is a way with Babies. The Sister was plain Sister to all the world, and therefore to Hugh Aquila she was Sister as well; but with a difference, for to him she was sister with a small initial, because he had entered into a solemn undertaking and promise, with the Sacrament of Vows and Kisses, to

marry her sister after the manner of the world—Norah Cronan, at that time Private Secretary to Mr. Murridge, of Finsbury Circus. All mankind were Calista's Brothers, and yet she called one or two of them by their Christian-names. One of them was Hugh, her sister's fiancé, the other was a young gentleman who, at that moment, was actually entering the great doors of the Hospital and making for the direction of the Resident Medical's private room.

Hugh Aquila, M.D., F.R.C.S., and L.R.C.P., was a strong, well-built young man, with big limbs, and a large and capable head—a head which had been endowed with an ample cheek, a reasonable forehead, a firm mouth and chin, steady eyes, set under clear-cut eyebrows, and a nose both broad, straight, and long. This is rather an unusual nose. The nose which is broad and short is the humorous nose, but it generally argues a want of dignity; that which is narrow and long may belong to a most dignified person, but he is too often unsympathetic; that which is both short and narrow shows a lack of everything desirable in man. Since Hugh Aquila's nose was both broad and long, he could laugh and cry over other people's accidents and misfortunes—that is to say, he had sympathy, which is almost as valuable a quality for a young Doctor as for a novelist. Such a young man, one is sure at the very outset, will certainly make a good fight, and win a place somewhere well to the front, if not in the very front and foremost rank; it is not granted to every man to become Commander-in-Chief; there are a great many men, very good men indeed, who miss that supremacy, yet leave behind them a good record for courage, perseverance, and tenacity. Happy is the woman who is loved by such a man!

To add one more detail, Hugh had big, strong hands, but his fingers were delicate as well as strong. This was, perhaps, because he was skilled in anatomy, and already a sure hand in operations.

'Oh, Hugh,' said the Sister—it had been Mr. Aquila until a day or two before this—'oh, Hugh, I have had no opportunity before of telling you how glad and happy I am for Norah's sake.'

'Thank you, Calista,' he replied simply, taking her hand; 'everybody is very kind to me, and it is so much the better that we spoke and settled matters before this wonderful Succession.'

'Yes, I think it is. Though the Succession ought not to make any difference. Tell me, Hugh, is it long since you began to think of it?'

'I have been here for nearly twelve months; I had been here a week when first I saw Norah in this Ward. I began to think of it, as you say—that is, to think of her, then and there—my beauti-

ful Norah. She is like you, Calista, and yet unlike. She is as good as you are, but in another way. She belongs to the world, and you——'

'To my Babies,' said Calista, smiling.

'I should have put it differently. Strange and wonderful it is, Calista, that such a girl as Norah should be able to love such a man as——'

'No, Hugh; that must not be even thought. Norah is a happy girl to win your love. I suppose it is good that you should think your mistress an angel, because it makes her better. Remember what she thinks of you, her strong, and brave, and clever lover, and do not be too humble. Did you see her yesterday?'

'Yes; in the evening I found time for Camden Town, and had supper with her Ladyship.'

Strange to say they both smiled, and then their faces broadened, and they laughed. Did you ever see a Sister in a Hospital laugh? She smiles often. She smiles when the patients thank her and kiss her hand; when they get light-headed and talk nonsense; when they grumble and groan; when they go good, and promise to remain patient and steadfast, clothed in the armour of righteousness; or when they go away cured and strong again, and effusive in thanks; or when they come back again for the tenth time, for there are some known in Hospital Wards who spend as much of their lives as they possibly can in these comfortable places. But no one ever saw a Sister laugh except Hugh; and the effect on the Ward was incongruous, as if a Cardinal should dance a hornpipe, or a Bishop perform a breakdown. Some of the Babies felt it like a note out of harmony, and began the preliminary cough which, as every *père de famille* remembers, heralds the midnight bawl and the promenade about the bedroom. Calista, perhaps, received the cough as a warning; the laugh did not occur again, and, besides, to so sweet a Sister everything must be allowed. Therefore, the cough preliminary was not repeated, and none of the Babies really began to cry.

'His Lordship was present,' Hugh repeated. 'We had a pipe together. He sat in his robes and his coronet, of course, which become him extremely—especially when he has the pipe in his mouth. Yet I doubt if he is happier. His face expressed some anxiety, as if he was uncertain about his feet in those dizzy heights, and would like to come down again and be a commoner once more. Perhaps he thinks that when beheading begins again, Viscounts will have an early turn.'

'Poor dear father!'

'The brass-plate remains on the door unchanged—the plain H. Cronan, M.D.—and there is the red lamp with the night-bell just as usual. The boy, I believe, runs about with the basket and the bottles as before; the medicines are still made up by his Lordship's illustrious fingers; and he remains what the people unfeelingly call a Common Walker. Not even a carriage with a coronet upon it.'

'Oh, it seems too absurd if that is all that is to come of it!'

'Her Ladyship wore her court dress—the black silk one—you know it.'

'I know it. But, Hugh, don't laugh. It is a very trying thing for her.'

'I am not laughing at her, Calista. She informed me after supper that differences of rank must be respected, and that all matrimonial engagements made before the Succession would have to be reconsidered.'

'Oh, Hugh!'

'Uncle Joseph chimed in here. I suppose it was he who started the theory—dear old man! He said that of course his Lordship's daughters were now entitled to look forward to the most desirable alliances possible; they would marry naturally in their own rank, which has so long been kept concealed from them. Right-minded young men, he went on, would not require to be reminded of a thing so obvious. He is, indeed, a delightful old man.'

'What did Norah say?'

'She looked at her father, who laughed. As for me, I made a little speech. I said that Norah and I were above all things desirous of pleasing our parents—which is quite true, isn't it? so long as our parents are reasonable and try to please us. But marriage is a thing, I added, which is so curiously personal in its nature, that the most filial sons and daughters are bound to consider themselves first. Therefore, I said, Norah and I intended to continue our engagement, and to complete it as soon as we possibly could, even if we had to trample on all the distinctions of rank.'

Calista sighed. 'I wish this dreadful title had never come.'

'So do I. A white elephant would have been much more useful. One might at least kill him, and dissect him, and put his bones together in the back garden. I should like to have a white elephant. But what can be done with a Peerage when the income remains the same, and you have got to go on dispensing your own medicines?'

'But is there nothing at all? It must be an extraordinary Peerage.'

'There is nothing, your father tells me.'

'Then I am sure the best thing to do will be to make no difference at all, and to go on as if nothing had happened. What does Daffodil say?'

'He takes it pleasantly, after his manner, and laughs at it. In fact, no one would take it seriously if it were not for Uncle Joseph, who has got a fixed idea, which he has communicated to your mother, that every title is accompanied by a princely fortune. It appears that at the Hospital there is some excitement over the event. They haven't had an Honourable at the Hospital for a long time, and they naturally desire to make much of the title. So they have raised his rank, and he is now Baron Daffodil, Viscount Daffodil, and even Earl Daffodil, and while we were taking our cold mutton and pickles a post-card came for him addressed to the Right Honourable and Right Reverend His Grace the Duke Daffodil.'

'And what does your mother say, Hugh?'

'She says everything that is kind, and something that is surprising.'

And then the young man began talking about himself, and of the time, not far distant, when he would buy a practice and set up for himself, and start that partnership with Norah, and combine the serious work of a physician with love-making, which should be as blackberry jam to dry bread, or Soyer's sauce to cold mutton, and should turn the gloomy Doctor's house—presumably in Old Burlington Street or Savile Row—into a Palace of Enchantment.

Calista was a good listener, and she heard it all with answering smile and sympathetic eyes, and the young man, in his selfish happiness, accepted her sympathy and interest in his fortunes as if they were things due to him. Everybody used Calista in this fashion.

But the Babies watching their long talk grew suspicious. They were neglected. This young gentleman, whom they knew because twice every day he bent over their cribs, was not a Baby. Why did the Sister waste her time upon him? So great and so widespread was the uneasiness, that they first began with the cough preliminary already alluded to, and then with one accord burst into that wailing which was familiar to Virgil from his acquaintance with the Hospital near the Porta Navalis.

It was just what you would expect of a man that, at such a juncture, he should meanly run away, and leave the Babies to be wrestled with by the Sister. This is what Hugh did.

He went to his private room, a snuggery whither the Babies could not follow him, and where he proposed to spend the short remainder of the morning in an easy-chair, with a book in his hand to assist meditation on the virtues and graces of a certain young lady. He did not immediately carry out this intention, because there was a visitor occupying the one easy-chair in the room.

'Why, Dick?' said Hugh. 'I did not expect to see you here to-day.'

The visitor was a young man about his own age. When Hugh opened the door, he was sitting, with his head bent and his face set in deep gloom. But he hastened to put on a smile—rather a weak and a watery smile.

'I had nothing to do this morning, and so I took the omnibus to the Bank and walked over.'

'Are you come to contragulate me, Dick?'

'No, I'm not. Daff told me about the engagement. I suppose you know you've cut me out? Did she tell you how she'd refused me?'

'No. I have not talked about previous aspirants.'

'Yes; I asked her to marry me. Half a dozen times I asked, and she refused—that's all. Well, I'll congratulate you if you like. But I ought to have been told by some of them that you were in the field. I don't like being kept in the dark.'

'There has been no keeping in the dark, because I only came into the field, as you call it, four days ago.'

'Well—when are you going to get married?'

Dick looked as if a doubt might be raised as to this assertion.

'I don't know. Perhaps we may have to wait some time. I must find out, first, what my mother will be able to do for me. I haven't seen her yet since our engagement, and I don't know how she will like Norah. What is the matter, Dick? You look pretty bad this morning. If you weren't such a steady file, I should say you had been drinking and keeping late hours.'

Dick Murridge was at most times a young man of gloomy and sombre aspect. At this moment, he looked as if sunshine would have no place in his countenance at all; his face was pale, and his hair black and straight; his eyes were black and set back in his head; he had a short moustache; his mouth was set and hard; he never laughed, except in the primitive and primæval manner of laughing, namely, when anybody suffered some grievous misfortune, or when he was able to say a very disagreeable thing; his chin was

square and hard. He was dressed quietly, even for his age, with almost ostentatious quietness, in a frock-coat buttoned closely, dark trousers, and tall hat, something like the good young man who on Sunday morning may be met, with a book in his hand, wrapped in a white handkerchief, on his way to early Sunday School. He did not carry a book, but there was about him something which proclaimed contempt of mashers. Barmaids and ballet-girls would feel quite safe and therefore happy with a young man who dressed in this fashion.

'You are such a staid and serious character,' continued the Resident, 'that it can't be drink and late hours. Got no pain anywhere, have you? Is it some worry?'

'What should I be worried about, I should like to know?' he replied almost savagely.

'Can't say, Dick. Shortness of temper, perhaps. It is like shortness of breath, difficult to cure, but it can be alleviated. Are you going to stay and have some early dinner with me?'

'No; I must go home. My father expects me at half-past one. Sunday dinner at home is as cheerful as a meal in a sepulchre among the bones. But I must go. How does Norah like the Grand Succession and the Family Honours?'

'Oh, it will not make the least difference to us.'

'There isn't any money with the title, I hear; but it ought to help a man in your Profession, for his wife to have a handle to her name, even if it's only an Honourable. I'd make it help me, I know; if I was a Physician, I'd get money out of it somehow. It's the only thing in the world worth getting or having. Title! What's a title without an income? But if I had the title I'd soon get the income.'

'I believe you would, Dick,' Hugh replied quietly.

These two young men had been at school together. Of the old school-days there remained the use of the Christian name. When they were quite young they may have had the same thoughts and the like ambitions. But their paths from the beginning diverged, and now they were so wide apart that they looked in opposite directions: one to the sunny south, and one to the bleak north. One looked downwards, and the other upwards. One saw a bright and sunny picture, with wonderful and unvarying effects of light and colour, and the other saw only a gray and fog-laden landscape, with a bit of lurid sky; one saw men and women, noble, erect, and godlike; the other saw men and women, creeping, sneaking, backbiting, filching, and treacherous. One longed to give, and the other only lived that he might grab.

Hugh thought he had never seen his former friend more morose and grumpy. This dark and gloomy creature, to want his bright and clever Norah! His cheek flamed at the very thought.

They stood in silence for a while, each expectant that the other would say something. Then Dick asked if Calista was in her Ward, and learning that he would find her there, he went away.

'There is something,' said the young Doctor, 'not quite right with Dick. He can't have taken to drink. Yet there was a look as of drink—unsteadiness in his hands and eyes, no purpose in his movements, want of will in his manner. There is something very queer about Dick Murridge.'

The young Doctor drew two letters from his pocket, and fell to reading them. That is to say, he read them eagerly, and yet slowly, as if he wanted to read every word. Nobody shall know what was in the first letter, except that it was signed 'Norah,' with some very sweet words preceding the signature. He sat with this letter in his hands for a while, meditating on the charms and graces of the writer. Then he put it back into his pocket-book, and read the other letter, which was from his mother:

'MY DEAREST SON (she said),

'I am quite ready to believe that your mistress is everything that you believe her to be, as good, and as sweet, and as beautiful. I pray that you may have as good a wife as you deserve, and that is saying a great deal. Will you please give Norah my love, and tell her I am looking forward with the greatest eagerness to seeing her and getting to know her? As regards your plan and manner of living, I quite approve of your ambition to become a successful Physician. It is fortunate that you are the son of a successful singer, my dear boy. You will have no difficulty in making the attempt. As for my money, it was made for you, and is all your own, if you want it all. There is, however, a great surprise for me in your letter, apart from the news of your engagement, which ought not to be a surprise to a mother. It is the surname and the Christian name of your *fiancée*. Is she one of the Clonsilla Cronans? In that case her Christian name is easily accounted for. There should be also a Calista in the family, and her father's Christian name should be Hyacinth. They should also be poor, which I suppose is the case with them, because you tell me her father is a General Practitioner in Camden Town. Tell me, when you write next, about their family, which concerns you in a very strange manner. But of this I will tell you when we meet. I

hope to see you—and Norah—next month. But do not forget to answer this question—Is her father's Christian name Hyacinth?

'Your affectionate

'MOTHER.'

'Well, his name is certainly Hyacinth; and there is a Calista in the family. And they are the Clonsilla Cronans. I wonder what the Mater means? After all, she will tell me in her own time.'

He laid his head back and closed his eyes. He had been up half the night with a bad case, and he fell asleep instantaneously, and slept till they brought him his early dinner.

There certainly was something very queer with the other young man, and he was going to Calista in order to tell her so. He had been accustomed for a great many years to make Calista that kind of half-confidant who shares all the woes, hears nothing of their cause, and is forgotten when things run smoothly. Persons like Calista always have plenty of friends, who make use of their sympathies when trouble has to be faced.

'Calista,' he said, dropping into a chair, 'I wish I was dead!'

'Do you, Dick? You said the same thing about two months ago, when I saw you last, yet I heard afterwards that you were cheerful.'

'I wish I was dead now, then.'

'What has happened? What is the matter?'

'I didn't say anything had happened. I said, "I wish I was dead."'

'Is that all you have come to tell me?'

'Not quite. I've come to tell you—— Oh, Calista, I'm the most miserable, unlucky beggar in the world!'

'What is it, Dick? Have you done anything foolish?'

'I've—I've——' He stopped, because he caught Calista's clear eyes gazing steadily in his, and it seemed as if he changed his purpose. 'I didn't know,' he said in confusion, 'that it would really happen until this morning. Now I find it must.'

'What will happen?'

'You will remember my words when it comes off—will you? I came to warn you.'

'Well, Dick, if anything is to happen, and I am not to know what it is, I see no use in warning me.'

'I warn you because I want you to understand that it is all her own fault.'

'Whose own fault?'

'Whose should it be but Norah's? I'm talking about her, ain't I? Very well, then. Let her understand that it is her own fault.'

'What has Norah done?'

'She's deceived me. That's what she's done. I've offered myself a dozen times, and she has refused me. Told me there was nobody else that she cared for; said she didn't want to get married; said that last week; and then I hear she's engaged.'

'Very well. You are not going to take revenge upon her, are you, Dick? That would be mean indeed.'

'Not revenge. It isn't revenge. And yet it's all her own fault, whatever happens.'

'You are very mysterious this morning, Dick, and very gloomy. Well, if you have nothing more to say, had you not better be getting back home? It is twelve o'clock already.'

'You can tell her if anything happens,' he repeated, 'that you knew all along it was coming, and that it is all her own fault.'

'Go, Dick. You are worse than gloomy this morning. You are wicked. I will listen to you no longer.'

He turned and flung himself from the room. I use the word which would have pleased him most, because he desired to fling himself. The people who fling themselves from a room are the same who curl their lips as well as their locks, and knit a brow as easily as a stocking, and flash flames from their eyes as well as from a lucifer match. But good flinging requires a narrow stage, or, at least, close proximity to the door. At the Adelphi, before the villain flings, it may be observed that he carefully edges up close to the door. Now, the Ward was a long room, and Dick's fling became, before he reached the door-handle, an ignoble stride, which was rendered only partially efficient by his banging the door after him, so that all the Babies jumped.

'Something,' said Calista, in the same words as those of the Resident Medical—'something is certainly wrong with Dick. And he is trying to set himself right by laying the blame on Norah. What can it be? And what can he mean by his vague threats?'

She tried to dismiss the subject from her mind. A man does not try to injure a girl because she has refused him. Yet she was uneasy; and in the afternoon, when Norah came to the Hospital, and Hugh made love to her before Calista's eyes, Dick's gloomy words kept repeating themselves in her brain:

'It is all her fault, whatever happens.'

CHAPTER II.

HIS LORDSHIP'S TOWN HOUSE.

THE residence of Hyacinth Cronan, M.D., L.R.C.P., General Practitioner, was in Camden Street, Camden Town. His Surgery, his consulting-room, and his red lamp were also attached to the same house, where patients not only received advice, but saw their medicines mixed before their eyes, and might also, if they wished, have their teeth drawn. The part of Camden Street where he lived is that which lies about the Parish Church, and therefore nearly opposite the cemetery, which is now slowly becoming a kitchen-garden. The house is on the right-hand side, going north, and just beyond that very remarkable survival of rural antiquity, where the old cottages still stand behind long strips of garden running down to the road. Some of the gardens are receptacles for old vehicles and wheelbarrows; some are strewed with the *débris* of a workshop; some are gardens still, with cabbages and sunflowers. This situation, being in the very heart of Camden Town, is a most desirable one for every medical man who desires such a practice as Dr. Cronan enjoyed—viz., a wide connection and a large popularity, the confidence of many thousands, and an income of very few hundreds. Probably—it is not safe to make the statement with greater confidence—no practitioner in Camden Town had a larger practice; very few of his brethren, except among the youngest men—those just starting—made a smaller income. No man in the parish, except the postman, walked a greater number of miles every day; nor did anybody, except the tramcar conductor—and even he gets every other Sunday off, which the Doctor does not—work for longer hours.

There were, in Dr. Cronan's case, the usual compensations; though the income was small, the family was large; there were plenty of wants to exhaust the scanty means; though the loaves were few, the mouths were many. This is, as has often been remarked, one of Dame Nature's playful ways. She substitutes for the things which are missing, those which are superfluous or least prayed for; she adds to the things which are already possessed others which may deprive them of their value. Thus, on him who has the greatest good-fortune, luck, and worldly happiness, she bestows an asthma which deprives him of the power of enjoying anything at all, and when a poor man has succeeded with infinite trouble and self-denial in saving a little money, she sends

him an illness or a misfortune which gobbles up his little all; to the rich man she denies an heir, and to the poor man, who has nothing to leave, she showers heirs and heiresses. However, Dame Nature means well, and we are but poor blind mortals, and, doubtless, know not what is best for us. On this principle of playfulness, Nature had enriched Dr. Hyacinth Cronan with ten children, of whom Calista, the eldest, now in her twenty-second year, was, as we have seen, a Sister at the Children's Hospital. The second, named Hyacinth, after his father, was at University College Hospital, on the point of completing his student-time. After Hyacinth came Norah, private secretary to a genealogist, recently engaged to Hugh Aquila. Then followed Patrick, who followed the sea, and was a midshipman, or fourth officer, as, I think, it is now called, on board a P.O. boat in Indian waters. After Pat followed those who were still at school—Alberic, Terence, Geraldine, Larry, Honor, and Kathleen.

It will be understood from these names that Dr. Cronan was of Irish extraction. He was born, in fact, in Dublin—he still pronounced it Doblun—and he graduated at Trinity College, and such relations as he had were understood by his wife, who never saw any of them, to be still resident in the distressful country, where Irish people are fond of talking about their families. Dr. Cronan, however, hardly ever mentioned his people. Yet he gave all his children Christian-names more common in Ireland than on this side of the Channel. When a man is taciturn on the subject of his origin there is generally a presumption that it is not such as makes men stick out their chins. On the mother's side, however, to make up—Nature's way again—the children could boast of the most honourable connections. Their grandfather had been an Alderman. More important still, he had made money at his trade of chronometer-maker. He was one of those amiable persons who not only take a pride in their calling and turn out none but the very best instruments, but who consider that, next to good work, there is nothing worth thinking of but the saving of money. There are always, everywhere, plenty of these good persons; they save, scrape, stint, skin, and spare through the whole of their lives, happy in leaving behind them a good large fortune to be divided. But in a generation or so one of them saves so much and has so few heirs that a new family may be founded; generally the money is divided among so many that it just serves to make some of the women of the next generation lead easier lives, and some of the men lazier. It is something to achieve, even to improve the lives of a few unborn

women; they certainly will never want to do any work, and perhaps they will not get the chance of marriage, and if they do, will be all the better for the money they bring to the family pot. As for the young men, for the most part they run through their money and take a lower place, cheerfully or sulkily, according to taste. It is strange, however, that in a country second only to one in its Love of the Almighty Dollar, justice has never been done to the benefactor who spends his life in saving up for his grandchildren. No poems have been written upon him; no statues have been erected to his honour—no one is expected to go and do the like; he is even held up to ridicule and execration as a money-grubber, a grinder of noses on the grindstone, a hard master—one who will have his pound of flesh. What matter for the hardness when one thinks of the result? How few among us are there who, in the days of their youth, remember their unborn grandchildren, and resolve to work for them, live for them, and save for them! Think of the resolution that young man must possess who can say: 'I mean to scrape and screw all the days of my life for those I shall never live to see. I will deny myself the pleasures and indulgences of my age. I will forego delights, and live laborious days, and all for those who will never know me, and who will forget even to thank me, and very likely will be ashamed of the shop.' A noble young man, indeed! Would that, in the last generation but one, there had been a great many more like this young man, Mrs. Cronan's father. Yet he, for one, was not without reward, because he rose to be an Alderman, and was Warden of his Company, and, in both capacities, devoured, in his time, quantities of turtle-soup every year. It was entirely through his virtuous self-denial that Mrs. Cronan, his grand-daughter, whom he did not live to see, was possessed of a substantial income, no less than two hundred pounds a year. What the ten children would have done without that two hundred a year one cannot even think. What became of all the rest of the Alderman's money I know not. Some of the grandchildren had, no doubt, run through their portions, and were gone abroad; some were clerks; some had shops; some were professional men; not one, I am sure, was imitating the great example of his grandfather, and saving money for those of the twentieth century to spend.

One evening in June, about half-past nine o'clock, while it is still almost light enough to read without a lamp, Dr. Cronan sat by the empty fireplace in the family dining-room, surrounded by his family. It was not every evening that he could thus sit at his ease,

in slippers, with a pipe between his lips, and the 'materials' on the table. The room was called the dining-room, but it was used as the family sitting-room, work-room, study, and anything else. They lived in it, they received their visitors in it, and they took their meals in it. The window was open, for it was actually a warm evening, though only at the beginning of June; the gas was lit, and if the room was rather crowded it had a happy look, as if the family were, on the whole, good-tempered. Among those family possessions which the visitor at once involuntarily recognises, even before he has had time to look at the china and the pictures, good-temper is the first, if it is found in the house at all.

The Cronans took their good temper chiefly from their father—it was just one more of Nature's compensations to make up for the small income. No one ever saw the Doctor cross or irritable, not even when, after a long day's work, he was called out again at bedtime. He was a tall man of spare figure; his once dark hair and whiskers well streaked with gray. His features were clear and handsome, and his blue eyes had a trick of lighting up suddenly, and his mouth of dropping into a smile on small provocation. Certainly not a weeping philosopher, nor one inclined to rail at the times, even if they were ten times as disjointed.

The picture of family life at its easiest and happiest presented in this Camden Town household is reproduced every night in miles of streets and thousands of houses. It is complete when the mother sits—as Mrs. Cronan sat this evening—with a basket of work before her, placidly stitching. She had been married for twenty-four years, and had stitched without stopping for twenty-three years, so that she now desired no other occupation but leisurely stitching. When the children were younger there was greater pressure—the stitching was hurried. Beside her sat her second daughter, Norah. She had a book in her hand, but I think she was not reading much, for she did not turn over the pages, and her eyes were looking through the open window into the back-garden, where two lilacs and a laburnum were in full blossom. When a girl is engaged to the most delightful fellow in the world, and the cleverest, there are not many books which she cares to read. If it be asked why she was not assisting her mother in darning the family stockings, it is enough to reply that a girl who is Private Secretary to a genealogist, who draws a salary and pays for her own board, and who is engaged all day in the most scientific researches, cannot be expected to darn stockings in the evening. Geraldine, the third daughter, was learning a

lesson for next day's school, and the three boys, Terence, Alberic, and Larry, were having a Row Royal, in which nobody interfered —in so large a family there is always a row going on between some of the members—over a backgammon-board. That is to say, two of them were quarrelling, and the third, who ardently desired to swing a shillelagh in the fray, had been hustled and bundled out of the squabble at an early stage, and now sat quiet, waiting for his chance.

Such a picture as this is truly national; it represents the English bonheur de famille. Less civilized nations go to theatres, cafés chantants, open-air concerts, operas, dances, circuses, public gardens —all kinds of things. All our family people stay at home, each household in its own nest. The elder boys, however, have got a trick of spending the evening out. In his hand the Doctor had an evening paper, and he was reading it slowly, as is the habit with men who have no time for much reading, and sometimes forget the newspaper for many days together. From time to time he jerked a piece of news at his wife, who never read a paper at all, and knew nothing of any politics outside the walls of her own house.

Then the door opened, and an old gentleman came in. He was a very clean, good-looking old gentleman, grave, and even severe, but not benevolent of aspect. Quite the contrary, indeed, though his locks were so silvery white and so abundant, and his beard so beautiful and so creamy. He would have looked benevolent, perhaps, but for his under-lip, which projected and gave a grumpy look to an otherwise open and kindly countenance. This was Uncle Joseph himself. He was dressed in evening costume—not the old-fashioned swallow-tail which old men used to wear by day, but the correct evening dress of the day, with a shirt-front decorated with one stud and a white tie. He wore this dress—a most unusual dress in Camden Town—as if he was accustomed to it, not as if it was a kind of disguise. At sight of their great-uncle, the boys shut up the backgammon-board, and all three retired together promptly, and were heard to finish their game and their quarrel in some upstairs apartment. Norah, for her part, applied herself vigorously to her novel, and her father buried himself in the paper. So great was the popularity of Uncle Joseph.

Uncle Joseph shook his head solemnly, took a chair as if he were assisting at a funeral, and sat down beside his niece—Mrs. Cronan —with a sigh that was almost like a groan. He sighed a great deal in the evening, which, for certain reasons, was a trying time with him.

'Two years ago'—he addressed the Doctor, but received no response from the newspaper, and therefore he turned to his niece: 'Two years ago, Maria, I should now, at this moment, half-past nine, be sitting on the right hand, or perhaps the left, of the Chairman. The Banquet would be nearly over, and the eloquence of the evening, in which I always took part in a few well-chosen sentences, would be about to begin. If you sit down at half-past seven or a quarter to eight, the speeches generally begin at half-past nine.'

'Yes, indeed, Uncle Joseph,' Mrs. Cronan replied with a sigh sympathetic; 'it must be a beautiful thing to remember.'

'Beautiful indeed, Maria!' He sighed again. 'I will take a glass of gin-and-water. But it is all over—it is all over. I shall hear those speeches no more. I shall drink that champagne no more. Piper sec and Heidsieck are strangers to me henceforth.'

'In heaven, uncle,' Mrs. Cronan suggested piously, 'there is finer champagne.'

The old man shook his head doubtfully, as if he thought that could not be.

'And nearly every night, uncle, wasn't it?'

'Nearly every night, Maria. Always in evening dress, and wearing the magnificent jewels of the order. Always the mysterious ceremonies of the Lodge, and the Banquet after the work was done. The Banquet—ah!' again he groaned, 'with the champagne. Nearly every day of my life, for more than thirty years—except Sunday—the Banquet and the champagne. In summer, the country Lodges; in winter, London. What a life, Maria! What a Career! And now it is over.'

Uncle Joseph, in fact, had been for something like thirty years the Secretary of a very Exalted Institution in Masonry, much grander than Grand Lodge. In this capacity—for which he was fitted by a very extraordinary memory and as great a genius for ceremonial as if he had been Grand Chamberlain—he was constantly occupied in visiting Lodges, and conducting the mysterious functions of the 'higher' degrees, those of which the humble wearers of the blue apron have no knowledge, and the outer world no appreciation. He spent, as he proudly told his niece, nearly every night of his life in this work, and as the Function in every right-minded Lodge is always followed by a Banquet, there was certainly no other man in the whole world, outside Royal circles, who had consumed such an enormous quantity of champagne, and was possessed of a finer palate. But to all things there cometh an

end. The Secretary grew old. He began to find travelling wearisome; his memory began to fail him—it was whispered that he had once imparted the secrets of a Higher instead of a Lower Degree by mistake, a truly dreadful thing to do, and believed to have caused the Earthquake in Java; things began to be said about slipshod conduct of the work; and, finally, the Council resolved that the time was come when he must resign. They gave him, however, a pension of one hundred pounds a year, which he brought to the Cronan household, where he came to lodge and to grumble.

His champagne was cut off; it was gone for good. He would never again—alas!—taste of that divine drink. No wonder that the old man went heavily, and was always discontented. For he craved continually after champagne. He found some consolation in putting on his dress-clothes every night, and in talking over the once splendid past he had a sympathic listener in his niece, and he found gin-and-water a substitute for champagne, inadequate it is true, but better than nothing.

'It has been a brilliant career, Maria,' he said. 'Few men—it has often been said in my own presence—have sat at more or at nobler Banquets. I doubt if any man, except a Prince, and he must be a Prince of seventy at least, has drunk more champagne than your poor uncle. Yet such a life has its drawbacks; you can't save money by eating and drinking; the more brilliant it is, the more champagne you drink, the less chance you've got of saving. You can't save champagne, and now, you see, nothing but the memory remains.'

'Indeed, Uncle Joseph, we are all proud of you.'

'And now I'm come down to a pension of a hundred a year and to gin-and-water. Give me another glass, Maria. Gin-and-water!'

'You must think of the Banquets, uncle, and the great company you kept, uncle.'

'The highest in the land,' he replied solemnly. 'I have initiated and raised to the most sublime Degrees Royal Princes and the noblest of the Nobility, young and old. As for Dukes, Marquises, Earls, and Barons, they have been under my hands, meek and obedient, by the hundred. I've lost count of Baronets, and Knights I value not at all. Yes, Maria. It gives a man some satisfaction in his old age to feel he's done so much good, and been so greatly honoured. No doubt such a life bestows an Air of Distinction. I put it on with my evening-dress. The jewels are upstairs. It would not be proper to adorn my breast with those splendid regalia outside a Lodge. I can leave my jewels to your

children, Maria, but not the Air of Distinction. That can't be left to anybody.'

'It cannot, Uncle Joseph, no more than a Smile.'

'I've often thought, Maria,' the old man continued, 'that I should have liked one of your boys to take up the same line. But of course it is too much to expect of them. It is a gift. Such a man as myself can't be made. He is born, as they say of a poet. Either a young man has the genius or he has not. Lord! Most Masters, whether in the Chair or past it, have got no more real knowledge of the Ritual, whatever the Degree, than they have of the Roman Mass.'

'Of course I don't know what it is,' said Mrs. Cronan; 'but I've always understood——'

'You can't understand, Maria. No women can. It's beyond their intellects to understand such sublimity and such intricacy. More than a dozen different Rituals—think of that! Every one complete and different, and all to be worked exact and word for word. All those Rituals at my fingers'-ends, without flaw or hitch, and me the man deputed to work them, for instruction, for raising and advancing, and a separate dress for each, with its own Jewels. The aprons and the scarves are upstairs, with the Jewels. But the Rituals—they mustn't be written, and there's no one, anywhere, who knows them like me. They've got a young man in my place. I trained him. But, as for comparing him with me—— Well, I pity the young man. They will make comparisons, and they will despise him.'

He shook his head mournfully.

'Your boys are all handsome, Maria. Any of them would look well in the Apron and the Jewels of the Order. But what is one to expect of them when their father has always refused to join the Craft, and scoffs at it openly? It is wrong of him, Maria, and I have known Doctors made by joining a Lodge, and making themselves popular in it. I would have taught your boys, and advanced them, and introduced them. But are they taught reverence for the Ritual? I would have taken them to a school for manners. How are manners to be learned in Camden Town? I could have shown them a way to associate with the Great. How are they to hope for intimacy with Royalty and the Nobility unless they become Brethren? Why, for my own part, I have conversed with the noblest in the country as their equal—actually their equal. And I have exchanged opinions with the Prince himself without a stammer, Maria.'

'Oh, good Lord!'

This unseemly interruption was due to the Doctor, who suddenly jumped up with this profane cry. He dropped back, however, and sat down again, gazing about him with a look of the blankest amazement. The start and the cry might have been forced from him by suddenly sitting on a pin, or by exasperation beyond endurance with Uncle Joseph's tedious prattle, or by some sharp internal pain, or by the recollection of some frightful omission or blunder. But that look of amazement—what did that mean?

'Gracious!' cried Mrs. Cronan; 'what has come to you, my dear?'

'Nothing,' said the Doctor.

He picked up the paper which he had dropped, folded it very carefully, and placed it in his pocket—a thing which he had never been known to do in all his life before.

'There must be something the matter,' his wife persisted. 'Is it toothache?'

'It is nothing,' he repeated; 'nothing of the least importance to us, or to anybody.'

'Then it is something,' said Norah, 'and something that concerns you, at least, papa; and it is something that you read in the paper. Let me read the paper, too.'

He made no reply, except to look about him with a bewildered look, as one who wonders what he is going to do next.

'If I am allowed to talk without being interrupted,' said Uncle Joseph irritably, 'I was going to say, Maria——'

'Papa, let me see the paper,' said Norah again.

'No, my dear, not to-night. I dare say you will hear soon enough.'

'I was going to say, Maria——'

'Yes, Uncle Joseph. Your father will show me the paper to-night, Norah,' said Mrs. Cronan, in a tone which implied that, as a wife, she meant to know the secret, whatever it was. 'If there is anything in it which concerns you, of course I can tell it to you in the morning. Go on, Uncle Joseph.'

'I was going to say, Maria, when these interruptions began, that there is something in noble blood which one remarks on the very first introduction. It is something——'

Here the door opened, and Uncle Joseph was a third time interrupted. He sat back in his chair, and began to drum the table with his fingers, but only for a few moments, because the thing which followed was of such a surprising and startling character that for once he forgot his own reminiscences.

This late visitor was an elderly man with iron-gray hair, short of stature, and of thick build, but not fat; a man of hard face—hardness in his gray eyes, hardness in his firm-set mouth, hardness in his chin. As he stood in the doorway, Norah, who had her mind full of her novel, thought he looked like a landlord come to sell up everybody without pity. Nobody knew him better than herself, and her knowledge of him did not make that resemblance impossible. For Mr. Murridge was her employer; she was his Private Secretary.

'I don't know, Doctor,' said the visitor, 'whether I ought to offer you my condolences over the death of your illustrious cousin, or my congratulations on your accession to his honours.'

'I don't know, either—hang me if I do!' said the Doctor.

'You have, I suppose, seen the evening papers? The paragraph is in all of them. I wonder how these Editors get hold of news so quickly. The news of his Lordship's death arrived this morning only.'

'But my two cousins?'

'One of them died three years ago, and the other three months ago.'

'Good Heavens!' cried the Doctor, sinking into his chair.

'Papa,' said Norah, 'something has happened. I think you had better let me see the paper.'

The Doctor sighed, but he drew the thing out of his pocket and handed it to his daughter.

While she ran her eye down the columns nobody spoke. Mrs. Cronan held a needle in suspense at the very moment of action; Uncle Joseph ceased drumming; Mr. Murridge smiled superior, as one who knows what is coming; and the Doctor looked more miserable and foolish than at any previous situation in his whole life.

'I have found it!' cried Norah. 'Listen, mother. Where is Daffodil? Where is Calista? The children ought to be taken out of bed and brought down. Oh, here is news! Listen, everybody. Papa, is it possible? You knew it all before, and you told none of us—not even me. Mother, didn't you know?'

'Your mother's grandfather, the Alderman——' Uncle Joseph began; but Norah interrupted, reading breathlessly:

'"We have to announce the death of Hugh Hyacinth, Viscount Clonsilla, of the Irish Peerage, which took place in the island of Madeira, a fortnight ago. Lord Clonsilla was born in Dublin in the year 1810, and was therefore in his seventy-fifth year. He

married, in 1836, Ursula, daughter of Sir Patrick M'Crath, Baronet, and had issue one son, who died unmarried in the year 1866. The late Lord never took any active part in politics. The heir to the Title is Hugh Hyacinth Cronan, Esquire, M.D., the great-grandson of the first Viscount, and son of the late Hugh Hyacinth Cronan, formerly of the Irish Civil Service. Dr. Cronan has been for many years practising as a Physician in London." THERE!'

'What does she mean?' asked Mrs. Cronan helplessly.

'We are all Viscounts and Honourables. Oh,' said Norah, 'what will Hugh say? What will Calista say? Good gracious! It's like a dream!'

'Hyacinth, tell me this instant,' cried Mrs. Cronan again, 'what it means!'

'It means, my Lady,' said Mr. Murridge, bowing low, though he was an old friend of the family, and had never bowed low before—'it means nothing less than that your noble husband is the Right Honourable the Viscount Clonsilla, of the Irish Peerage. Nothing less, I assure you.'

'A Lord Viscount!' said Uncle Joseph. 'There was a Viscount once—he was a Templar. Maria, there ought to be, on this occasion, a bottle of champagne.'

'Nothing less,' repeated Mr. Murridge.

'And nothing more,' said his Lordship. But no one heard him.

'A Viscount! My grandfather was an Alderman—and yet——Hyacinth, can't you speak? Why have I not been told?'

'It's Duke, Marquis, Earl, Viscount and Baron, Baronet and Knight, unless you reckon the Ranks of Grand Lodge and the Thirty-Third,' said Uncle Joseph. 'Really, Maria, on such an occasion——'

'There was no use in telling you of a chance which seemed so impossible,' said the Doctor.

'And I've been married to a nobleman's cousin for five-and-twenty years, and never knew it.'

'Only his second cousin once removed,' said the Doctor. 'My dear, I told you the truth. My father was in the Civil Service, as I told you. His grandfather was the first Viscount Clonsilla and the second Lord Clonsilla. When last I heard anything about it, Lord Clonsilla had a son, and a married brother, and a first cousin; all these stood between me and the Title. Was it worth talking about? I had no money; I had never spoken to the Viscount, or set eyes on him. Nor had my father before me. What was the good of my great relations?'

'Great relations are always good,' said his wife. 'If it hadn't been for the Alderman, my grandfather, and my Uncle Joseph, where would have been the Family Pride?'

'At all events, my Lady,' said Mr. Murridge, 'there is no doubt possible on the subject. The late Lord's only son died twenty years ago unmarried. His brother, it is true, was married, but he had no children. And the first cousin, who was the Heir Presumptive, died three months ago, also without offspring—S.P. as we say in genealogies. Consequently, the next heir to the Coronet and Title is—your husband.'

'Oh,' cried Norah, throwing her arms about her father's neck, 'I am so glad! You poor dear! You shan't go any longer slaving like a postman up and down the streets all day; you shan't be waked up by a bell, and made to go out in the middle of the night as if you were a railway-porter; you shan't any more make up your own medicines; you shall hand over all your patients to anybody who likes—give them to Hugh if you like. What will Hugh say when he finds out that I am the Honourable Norah—or are we the Ladies Calista and Norah?'

'The Lord knows!' said the Viscount, still looking helpless and bewildered.

'Well, I suppose Hugh won't mind much. Oh, and I suppose we shall go away from Camden Town and live at the West End—Notting Hill, even'—Norah's knowledge of the West was limited—'and drive about in our own carriage, and go to Theatres every night. Daffodil will give up the Hospitals and go into the House——'

'Perhaps we shall all go into the House, Norah, my dear,' said her father grimly.

'Oh, you will go into the Upper House! Of course, there's acres and acres of land in Ireland—dirty acres, the novels call them'—Mr. Murridge coughed and the Doctor changed colour—'and a Country House. What is the name of our Country House? Oh! I know it is a beautiful, grand old place, with a lake and swans, and a lovely garden, and the most wonderful glass houses, and a Scotch gardener: I haven't read Miss Braddon for nothing.'

'There was a Country House once. It was called Castle Clonsilla. But I believe it tumbled down years ago. The late Lord never saw the place since they shot at his father and hit the priest.'

'Well, then, there must be a grand old—old—venerable—ancient—romantic history of the House. You will tell us the Family

History, won't you, as soon as we settle down? All the men were knights without fear, and all the ladies were beautiful and without reproach.'

'I will tell it you at once. About two hundred years ago there was an attorney in Dublin, named Hyacinth Cronan. Creeping Joe, they called him, so greatly was he admired. He made his son a barrister, and the barrister became a Judge, and the Judge was made, for certain political services, Lord Clonsilla. Crawling Joe, his friends called him, to distinguish him from his father. His son, for other eminent political services, was raised a step in the Irish Peerage at the time of the Union. That is all the family history, Norah; and I am hanged if I see much to be proud of when it is told.'

'Not one of them,' said Uncle Joseph, 'so much as a Provincial Grand Master.'

'Oh! And no Banshee? no Ghost? no White Lady? Are you quite sure?' asked Norah.

'Not even so much as a Family Bogey, my dear.'

'Well, then there is a Town House somewhere, I am sure. I hope it is in Ireland. I feel real Irish already. To-morrow I shall try "The Wearing of the Green." Where is our beautiful Town House—Lady Clonsilla's Town House—where she will live in the season with her daughters, the Ladies Calista, Norah, Honor, and Kathleen?'

'There used to be one over in Dublin, but I suppose it's been sold long ago.'

'Well, there's the money and the dirty acres,' Norah persisted.

'I wish you good-night, Lady Clonsilla,' said Mr. Murridge. 'Once more, I congratulate you. Good-night, my Lord.'

He bowed very low, much lower than is expected by Viscounts as a rule, and retired.

'I was about to remark, Maria,' said Uncle Joseph, 'when we were interrupted by Mr. Murridge, that I had always observed something of the Air of Rank in your husband. It was certain, to me, that he was of noble parentage, though he concealed the fact from friends who would have appreciated its importance.'

'Yes; you never told me. Oh, Hyacinth!' said his wife reproachfully. 'It would have made us all so happy to think that you had such noble blood in your veins.'

'My dear,' he repeated, 'I didn't know there was the least chance of the Peerage. It's the most extraordinary thing that ever happened. And, Maria,' he added, rubbing his chin, 'I believe I've

made the greatest Fool of myself ever known. I'll go and see Murridge about it to-morrow. But I am sure of it, beforehand. There never was a Greater Fool in all the world than your husband, Maria.'

'Oh,' cried Norah again, 'you will look so beautiful in your coronet!'

'Shall I, my dear? I wonder where it is. What is more to the point is, whether the late Lord left any money, and if so, whether he left any to me. There certainly never could have been a Greater Fool than your father, child. Esau's case is about the only one which can compare with it.'

'Maria,' said Uncle Joseph, 'we will all move upwards, immediately, into the highest Society, and we will have a Banquet, with Champagne, every night. On all points of etiquette rely on me. There will be, of course, waiters in evening-dress. It will be exactly like a Banquet of a High Degree, only that ladies will be present and I shall not wear my Jewels. Of course, I shall sit on the right hand of the Chairman and respond for the Craft.'

'Oh, Uncle Joseph!' murmured Lady Clonsilla, carried away by the splendour of his imagination.

'As for his Lordship, I will take him in hand at once——'

'I have been the most Almighty Fool,' said his Lordship.

'And initiate him to the Loftiest Degrees. I'll do it with my own hand, and then he will be a credit and an honour to the illustrious Peerage of his native country. I can't initiate you, Maria, nor the girls, because you are females. But the boys I can, and I will, and when they are Knights Templars, Mark Masters, Royal Arches, and Thirty-Seconds, they will not be ashamed to talk with anyone, and will be fit to share in the very highest Society like their Great Uncle.' He drank half his glass at a gulp, and went on rather thickly, pointing to the Doctor: 'Look at him, Maria! He is a Nobleman all over. Blood in his veins and Aristocracy upon his upper-lip. Didn't I always say there was a Something in your husband above his Pills?'

'It can't be helped, Maria,' said the Viscount. 'But I wish your husband had not been so great a Fool.'

'Why, on the present occasion,' Uncle Joseph went on—'an occasion which may never happen again in the History of the Lodge—why, Maria—why is there no champagne? Thank you! I will take—yes—I will take another glass of gin-and-water.'

CHAPTER III.

A LONG MORNING IN THE CITY.

MR. MURRIDGE was, by profession, a Genealogist. This is a trade in which are few competitors. There are, to be sure, the Heralds, who are a dignified body, and have a College of their own, and on occasions of ceremony wear the most beautiful coats in the world, and, consequently, are tempted to wish that there was a Coronation every week. They also enjoy much finer titles than the Members of the Upper House, being called King-at-Arms, Herald or Pursuivant, Rouge Dragon, Rouge Croix, Bluemantle, and Portcullis. Mr. Murridge possessed no other title than that of plain Mister, which we are not expected to enjoy. It was reported of him, by those who regarded him as an interloper and an unqualified practitioner, that he had originally been apprenticed to a Die-Sinker, and was afterwards employed in engraving coats-of-arms for one who kept a heraldic shop, ornamented outside by the gilded effigies of a Loathly Worm, like unto the Dragon of Spindleston Heugh. This enterprising tradesman not only engraved shields and furnished family seals, but also found their coats-of-arms for people who had lost them so long that all memory and trace of them had vanished. Nothing proves a family to be old so much as to have lost the memory of their arms. There are many such; they have withered in obscurity and neglect for generations; then one of them makes money, and such gentlemen as this heraldic shopkeeper recover the long-lost connections and land them proudly among the Barons in the Wars of the Roses. In this way, therefore, old Murridge found himself impelled in the direction of genealogical studies, and in this way he gradually neglected the practice of his art, and transformed himself into a searcher and grubber into family history.

Although there are not many in the trade, it is sometimes profitable. For there are always the New Rich, who continually desire to prove that they have always, though their friends little suspected it, really belonged to the class which rules by Right Divine, and by the same right possesses hereditary brains; and there are, besides these, the Rich *d'outremer*, who bear names of English origin and would fain prove their connection with great English Houses, and are willing to pay handsomely for such a connection. Therefore, old Murridge generally found his hands fully occupied in tracing pedigrees, finding out missing links, proving marriages, establishing American connections, following up lines of descent, converting

plain country gentlemen into descendants of Royalty—this is a very lucrative branch of the profession—and in this way bringing vainglory, delight, honour, distinction, and solace to all who could afford to pay for it. So great, indeed, was his skill that he never failed to prove his client a cadet, at least, of some ancient House, and, when there was no Estate involved and the family was supposed to be extinct, he not infrequently made his client the Head of that House. Nothing could be conceived more pleasing to ladies and gentlemen who had been brought up to believe that for them there was no Family History—no more than at the beginning of the world—previous to the Family Shop where the money was made—whether a Shop with a counter, and a till, and an apron; or a Shop with an office and a clerk; or a Shop with a box of pills; or a Shop with a wig and gown; or a Shop with a sword and a red coat; or a Shop with a steel pen and a few pages of blank paper; or a Shop with a bundle of scrip and shares. So that Mr. Murridge was really a Philanthropist of the first water—an eighteen carat Philanthropist. If, from time to time, in his grubbing among genealogies, old wills, and family histories, he came upon curious discoveries which he was able to turn to his own advantage, he is not to be blamed. Notably, there was the succession to the Clonsilla Title, in which, as you will presently see, he did a very good stroke of business.

He lived modestly in College Street, Camden Town, at the town end, of course, where the trees are, and where the gentility of the street do mostly congregate. He was a man of regular habits. Every morning, at the same time, he took the same omnibus to the City; every evening, at the same time, he took the same omnibus back. He took his dinner every day at the same dining-rooms, and always spent the same amount upon it—namely, half-a-crown. When he got home he stayed there. He never read anything at all out of the way of his business, except the newspaper; he always read the same paper—namely, the *Standard*, because it gives most news. Whether his plain and regular life was deliberately chosen on account of parsimony, or whether it had become a habit, in the course of long years, or whether it was caused by smallness of income, nobody knows, because Mr. Murridge neither invited nor offered confidence with anyone.

His office was in Finsbury Circus, where he had two rooms on a second floor; the front room large and light, looking out on the open Place; the back room small and dingy, looking upon the Limbo of chimneys—workshops, back buildings, outhouses, and

grimy yards which one finds in that part of London. On the door-posts below, his name was painted: '*Second Floor*, JOHN MURRIDGE.' His own room was furnished with one very large table—genealogists, like civil engineers, require great tables—and another very small one; he had a great bookcase, full of books of reference, such as Dugdale, Douglas, Tonge, Beltram, Wotton, Collins, and Lysons, a really valuable collection; as for the county histories, one needs the resources of a Rothschild to possess them. There was also a large-sized safe in a corner, and there were tin boxes piled one above the other, as in a solicitor's office, and there were three or four chairs. The room at the back was not, properly speaking, furnished at all. That is to say, there was a table at the window with a blotting-pad, and an inkstand, and a chair before it. There was another table beside the fireplace, with a heavy copying-press upon it, the kind with a handle and a screw. This was for the boy-clerk, who posted the letters, copied them, and ran errands. The other table was for Mr. Murridge, Junior—Mr. Richard Murridge. His son and the clerk, together with the Private Secretary, completed Mr. Murridge's Staff, and formed his Establishment.

As regards Master Dick, it might be said of him, as of a great many others, that he would, doubtless, have been different had his training been other than what it was. Yet his education was not neglected. At school he learned only the things most useful in a commercial life, as a good hand, accounts and book-keeping, short-hand, French, and the art of writing a business-letter. He also had the advantage, being a day-boy, of his father's experience and practical wisdom, which was on tap, so to speak, every evening.

'I have taught my son, sir,' Mr. Murridge explained, 'to despise the common cant about Honour, Friendship, Justice, Charity, and the rest of it. The world is full of creatures who live by eating each other. There is no other way to live. We come into the City every day to eat each other, and to defend ourselves against those who would eat us. The way is to make as much money as we possibly can. As for Honour, it means that you must play fair where it is your interest; and Friendship means putting other people on to a good thing when you can't get it for yourself, and in exchange for another good thing. Benevolence means keeping the people you are eating up in good temper. Dick quite understands the world. There is no nonsense about Dick. Justice means having all you can get—all that the law allows—to the last penny, and never forgiving anybody. I have made the boy thoroughly understand these principles. He begins life with a clear head, and no sentimental humbug.'

It is not often that a boy's views are thus based upon the first elements of life and society, and Dick certainly began life with great advantages.

Unluckily for Dick, he was not allowed to put these principles into practice in an independent way. Mr. Murridge regarded his business as a thing to be kept together, and handed down as a property to his son. He, therefore, without any question as to Dick's aptitude for genealogical research and the art of clothing a man with a pedigree, removed him from school at an early age and placed him in his own back office, where he gave him copying work. You cannot possibly carry out any of these beautiful precepts and maxims on mere copying work.

Unfortunately, too, Mr. Murridge could never bring himself to trust his son. He was a jealous master, who would let no one into his secrets but himself, and worked, like the mole, underground. So that, though Dick was now three-and-twenty, he knew no more about his father's business than he did at sixteen, when he first took his seat in the back-office, except that his father would talk over the successful conduct of a case when it was completed, especially if there had been any difficulties or sharp practice in it. He did not dare to complain, but his position made him continually grumpy. It is not a good sign for a young man's future when he nourishes a secret grudge against his father, and when the father, absorbed in his own business, never stops to consider what his son is doing, and how he regards his own position and work.

Dick was now drawing the very handsome salary of seventy-five pounds a year, with breakfast, lodging, washing, supper, if he wanted it, and his Sunday dinner. He was, therefore, rich as clerks at three-and-twenty go. We may allow him eighteenpence a day for his dinner, or ten shillings a week, which comes to twenty-six pounds a year; fifteen pounds a year for his dress, which is not extravagant; ten pounds for a fortnight's holiday in the summer; and five pounds a year for his daily omnibus. There remained the handsome sum of nineteen pounds a year, or rather more than a shilling a day, to cover his amusements and his petty expenses. How many young fellows can afford a shilling a day for pleasure?

Dick had so few pleasures, that he must have been saving money. He was a very quiet young man—sons of masterful fathers generally are; he had taught himself to play the piano a little, and to draw a little, but languidly. When he was at home he spent most of the time at the old piano, which had been his mother's. When

he was at the office, he spent most of the time in drawing. He had no taste for reading; he seemed to care nothing for the things which form the pleasure of so many young men; he never went to the theatres or music-halls; he had no bicycle, belonged to no athletic club; and, except one or two old school-fellows, he had no friends. Yet of late he had got into the habit of spending every evening out. Where he went, or what he did, his father did not inquire.

A quiet young man, who seemed to be getting through his youth at a regular, even pace, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left, picking no fruits or flowers, and running after no butterflies, caught by none of the Jack-o'-lanterns which lead astray so many of the London youth—his father should have been satisfied with such a son.

But he was not. Mr. Murridge was disappointed that his son had no passion for anything. Dick was no fool, but he did his work like a machine; he took no interest in his work; he was spiritless.

Now a young man who is not a fool cannot be, though he may appear to be, a machine. Parents who have such sons as Dick should remember this proverb, which is one of the very few omitted from Solomon's Unique Collection—how good it is for the world that this King collected Proverbs instead of old Phœnician Ware and Prehistoric Pots! You will presently discover that Dick was no exception to this proverb.

Mr. Murridge's confidence was enjoyed, to a certain extent, by the young lady named Norah Cronan, who called herself his Private Secretary. He called her his clerk, but it made no difference in the salary, which remained at the same figure as that enjoyed by Dick—namely, seventy-five pounds a year. But he did next to nothing for the money, and she did the work of three men, being as sharp, clever, industrious, and zealous a girl as ever man had the good fortune to engage in his service. She came every morning at eleven, and generally spent an hour or two with her employer before she went off to the Museum, to the Record Office to consult parish registers, to read wills, to make extracts, and do all kinds of genealogical work, which kept her all day long and very often all the evening as well. She was nineteen years of age, and she knew—by heart, I think—nearly every genealogical work that exists in the vernacular. Of course, Mr. Murridge did not wholly trust her; perhaps he was afraid she might make discoveries and keep them to herself and make her own market out of them—he had done so himself in the old days; perhaps there were certain risky connections in his pedigrees which he did not wish to expose to the

girl's sharp eyes; perhaps he was constitutionally unable to trust anybody wholly. He might very well have trusted her, because she had never yet suspected that she might become a money-winner instead of a salary-earner—most men never do learn this lesson; still fewer women ever learn it, and so are contented to go on all their lives upon a wage, and nobly rejoice when the smallness of their own salaries has brought wealth to their employers. Therefore she was honest, and carried to Mr. Murridge everything she found, and never dreamed of withholding the least scrap of information. This is praiseworthy in every walk of life, but especially laudable in a genealogist, because this least scrap is always the thing which is of the greatest importance. Such a simple thing, for instance, as a single one-line entry in a parish register concerning a marriage a hundred years ago has been known to prove a very gold-mine to the discoverer. No man in the City had a more valuable clerk than Mr. Murridge, or a cheaper clerk.

Some there are who object to girl-clerks on the ground that although they are always honest, and may be underpaid and overworked to any extent, and though they never grumble and always carry out orders literally and exactly, one cannot swear at them. There is force in the objection, though it is not, I believe, felt by some of the gentlemen who employ girls to sell gloves, and bonnets, and beer, and soda-and-brandy, nor was it felt by Mr. Murridge, who, when Norah first came to him, swore at her every day. She did not like being sworn at. It made her limbs tremble and her face turn red and pale, but she thought it wisest to say nothing about it at home, for the usual reason that there was not much money going, and her small salary was useful; and, besides, her brother being a student at University College Hospital, there was, just then, less than usual. Whenever Mr. Murridge's orders were imperfectly obeyed or neglected, he swore at her. Why not? When he was a Prentice he had been sworn at every day, cuffed, caned, and kicked, until he became a smart Prentice and a good engraver. Why should he not swear at his own clerk? He did, and with such wearisome iteration of one word, that Norah grew to loathe that word, and to take any amount of pains and trouble in order not to hear it. It is quite a short word, and has been mistaken by some for good Saxon. This is wrong. The word was brought into this country by Julius Cæsar himself, who uttered it when he fell upon his nose on landing in Pevensey Bay. By this act he conferred it upon the land, so to speak, by solemn gift and deed, as a possession for ever. Vortigern subsequently taught it

to Hengist and his Saxons. St. Edmund of East Anglia taught it to the Danes just before they cut short his saintly career. Canute and Edmund Ironsides frequently exchanged it, standing a good way apart; Harold, in his last rally, so deeply impressed it upon Duke William that he strictly enjoined his sons never to suffer the word to be lost. It was the only paternal injunction which the Princes agreed in obeying. But the word is not Saxon.

Norah had now, however, been so long with Mr. Murridge, and had worked for him so well—pedigree-hunting is matter of instinct with some, like finding old books, or picking up old coins—that he had almost ceased to use 'language' even in her presence. He knew her value, and in his softer moments he had thoughts, even, of raising her salary.

At half-past ten in the morning all City offices are in their first fresh vigour and early morning enthusiasm of work. The glow of the dawn, so to speak, is upon them. The glow lingers till about half-past eleven, when fatigue and languor begin among the younger brethren; at twelve, many have visibly relaxed, and have begun to glance at the clock, and to wriggle on their seats. It is not, however, until five in the afternoon that the curse of labour is really felt to weigh heavily upon the shoulders of the young clerk. In Mr. Murridge's outer office there was no languor or fatigue possible, because there was no labour either for Mr. Richard or for the boy. It was a season of forgetfulness. No work had been given to Dick for three weeks, and, except in the evening, when there were letters to be put through the press, no work was ever given to the office-boy. During this enforced idleness, Dick Murridge sat the whole day at his table by the window which commanded a view of back-yards, chimneys, and outhouses. He amused himself by drawing girls' heads upon his blotting-pad in pencil. When one page was covered he turned it over and drew on the next, so that the pad was become a perfect gallery of loveliness. By dint of long practice he could draw a girl's face very well, whether full or in profile, or a three-quarter face. He looked at his watch a good deal, and he grumbled a good deal, and if the office-boy made any noise he used bad language, but not loud enough for his father to hear, because Mr. Murridge was one of those parents who reserve certain vices for their own use and forbid them to their sons.

The office-boy sat at another table on which was a copying-press. He had nothing to do, as a rule, except to copy letters by means of the press, and to go on errands.

But this boy never found the day too long or the Golden Hours

dull. This was because his table had a drawer. Even to an industrious clerk a drawer is a standing temptation. To the lazy clerk it is an ever-present snare; to the clerk who has nothing to do, the drawer is a never-failing solace and resource. This boy, a City-born boy, with sharp eyes, pasty face, and commonplace features, was able, by means of his drawer, to live all day long in another world. He kept it half-open, so that at the least movement or sound from the inner office, or change of position in Mr. Murridge, who sat with his back to him, he could, by a quick forward movement of his chest, shut the drawer suddenly and noiselessly, and be discovered, so to speak, in the attitude of the expectant, ready, and zealous clerk, eager to do something which would lessen the drain of his three half-crowns a week. Inside the drawer there was always a story—one of those spirit-stirring, exciting, and romantic stories of adventure, which can be bought for a penny, and which never pall upon the reader. So that this boy's days were passed in a delicious and delirious dream of adventure, love, and peril, tempered only by the fear of being suddenly found out and horribly cuffed or even dismissed, when he would catch it worse at home under the family cane. If the boy is not before long enabled to live up to that dream and to become a rover, pirate, smuggler, or highwayman, I fear that his whole future will be wrecked. Because there inevitably comes a time of hope too long deferred, when the realization of a dream, though possible, no longer seems delightful. This boy, at eighteen, may cease to desire the lawless life; or, if he pursues it, he may become a mere common burglar, forger, long-firm man, confidential-dodge man or welsher—joyless, moody, apprehensive, suspicious, and prone to sneak round a corner at sight of a man in blue-coat and helmet.

In the front room—Mr. Murridge's room—the Chief sat at a great table, covered with papers. He was not consulting any; he had before him half-a-dozen cheques, and he was looking at them with perturbed eyes. Sometimes he compared one with another; sometimes he looked at each separately; and as he looked, his hard face grew harder, and his keen eyes sharper. Six cheques. They were all drawn for the same sum—twelve pounds; and they were all signed by himself. One would not think that the contemplation of half-a-dozen cheques, payable to self or bearer, signed by one's own name, could take a busy man from his work. But they did.

About eleven o'clock the silence of the office was broken by a light step on the stair. The boy shut up his drawer with a swift and silent jerk of his chest, so that he might be discovered with

his elbows on the table, and his hands clasping the handles of the copying-press, a model attitude for the Zealous Unemployed, when the door opened, and a young lady appeared, carrying a black bag. This was the Private Secretary. She nodded pleasantly to Dick, and passed through the room into the inner office. But Dick responded with a grunt.

Mr. Murridge looked up, and greeted her with an ill-tempered snort.

'You're late again,' he said.

'I'm not,' she replied. 'Eleven is striking; and I never am late; and you know it. Be just, even though you are out of temper.'

'Your head is turned by your father's Title. I suppose you think you can say what you like. Is the Honourable Norah Cronan going to continue in her present employment?'

'I don't know. Very likely. Meantime there is this Case to finish. I have brought you some papers you will be pleased to see.'

'I don't know that anything can please me this morning. Give them to me. Humph! Mighty little, considering the time you've taken!'

'Hadn't you better read before you grumble? That's always the way with you when you get your fur rubbed the wrong way. Look at this, now.'

'Yes; will you read it to me?'

She always 'stood up' to him, and generally reduced him to good temper by sheer force of courage. To-day, however, he attempted no rejoinder, but meekly gave in without reply. It astonished her. Perhaps he was ill.

'Go on, please.'

Norah, therefore, sat down, and began to explain the nature and the bearing of her papers. Genealogical research is really most interesting work. You are always hunting for someone, and finding someone else. Then you go off on a dozen hunts, and you discover the most abominable falsehoods in printed pedigrees, with gaping flaws, and disconnections, and impossibilities, where everything looked fair and smooth. The girl enjoyed these things more than Mr. Murridge, for the simple reason that he could never for one moment forget how much money there might be in it. Now, no one ever enjoyed any kind of work, whether it is painting a picture with a brush, or painting a succession of pictures with a little steel pen and a sheet of blue paper, who keeps thinking all the while of the money. But while Norah told her story a strange thing happened—a very strange thing. For the first time in his life Mr.

Murridge was inattentive, and that over an important piece of work. He had often before been irritable, but never inattentive.

Outside, Dick Murridge had returned to his blotting-pad, and was gloomily drawing girls' heads upon it. The office-boy opened his drawer again very gently, and resumed the reading of his romance, which had been interrupted at the critical moment when Spring-heel Jack was commencing his earliest love-adventure. The lady was not described with any detail, but the boy concluded that in figure and face she must have greatly resembled Miss Cronan, whom he himself secretly loved, though he was aware that he had a rival. What would Spring-heel Jack have done to a rival? His mistress, since she was like Miss Cronan, was slender in figure, wore a neatly-fitting jacket, and a hat with a red feather in it. She had roses in her cheeks, dark brown hair, and full, steady eyes. The boy did not know the adjective, but he knew the quality of steadiness. She also had, like Miss Cronan, a sweet and pleasant smile. The lady in his story, however, did not resemble Miss Cronan in one particular. She was not a young lady 'in the City,' but was a Countess in her own Right, though disguised as a milk-maid.

Half an hour afterwards the girl came back to the outer office, with her black bag in her hand, on her way to resume her work upon the Case. It was, however, with a sense that her work had not been appreciated. Mr. Murridge was strangely inattentive. She shut the door after her, and turned to Dick, who slightly raised his right shoulder, a gesture familiar to the Grumpy, and considered effective. He then made the same gesture with the left shoulder. This indicates unrelenting Grumpiness.

'Well, Dick?' she said, waiting.

He made no reply whatever. The office-boy felt that he really ought to get up and wring the neck of his master's son for incivility. But he was not yet man enough.

Then Norah crossed the room, and laid her hand on Dick's shoulder.

'Come, Dick,' she said, 'don't be vindictive. Let us be friends.'

'Friends!' he replied. 'Oh yes; I know! You told me there was nothing between you and anybody, and next day I am told all about Hugh. Call that truthfulness, I suppose?'

'It was the truth, Dick. It really was.'

'I don't believe it. Sapphira!'

'Well, Dick, if you take it like that, I've got nothing to say.'

'I don't care what happens now. If anything happens it's your fault—you and all of you.'

'What will happen, Dick?'

'Anything may happen, I suppose. How am I to know what will happen?'

'Well, Dick,' the girl replied, 'I can't stay to guess riddles. Will you shake hands?'

'No. Sapphira!'

Norah retired without another word.

The office-boy thought of Spring-heel Jack, and what he would do under such provocation. But it was useless. He was not man enough by several inches.

Half an hour afterwards there was another step on the stairs. Dick hastened to assume the air of a Junior Partner, and the office-boy once more closed the drawer and grasped the handle of the copying-press.

This time it was Dr. Hyacinth Cronan. He was still in the overwhelming wave of the first day's enjoyment of his new honours. Yet one might have thought that there was something wanting, as if the full flavour of his title had not been quite brought out—it requires time for the complete enjoyment of everything, even a title. His brow was knitted, as they used to say in the old metaphorical times when people would knit a brow as well as a stocking and curl an upper-lip as easily as a ringlet, and hurl scornful words as readily and as effectively as big stones. They could also unhand each other. He looked, to put the thing plainly, disturbed.

'Is your father in his office?' he asked, cutting short Dick Murridge's proposed congratulations. 'I will step in.'

'I expected you this morning,' said Mr. Murridge. 'I expected you would look in. You came to talk over the new position. Well, I am not much accustomed'—he laughed a dry laugh—'to advise noble Lords.'

'You need not trouble about the title. I came especially to ask you about a certain document which I signed here two or three years ago.'

'Quite so. It is in my safe here. For the consideration of two hundred pounds—money down—you resigned the whole of your reversionary interests, whatever they might be.'

'I remember the transaction perfectly. You offered me two hundred pounds for my reversionary rights. I wanted the money pretty badly. I always do. The reversionary rights. You explained to me at the time that there were two lives between me and the succession. I thought I had no more chance of the title than I had of the Crown of England. Tell me exactly what it

was I sold. There are other rights besides reversionary rights, I suppose?'

'What you sold was your chance of succeeding to the property of which the late Lord Clonsilla was only a life-tenant.'

'What made you offer me the money?'

'Because I knew that yours was a substantial chance.'

'But there were two lives, men no older than myself, between Lord Clonsilla and myself.'

'One of them, when you signed that paper, I knew to be suffering from a hopeless disorder. He died, in fact, a few weeks afterwards. The other had been married for fifteen years without children. I hoped that he would have none. Well, my hopes were well founded; not only are there no children, but the man himself is dead. And you are the new Viscount, and what estate there is has come to me. It isn't much, after all.'

'You knew this and you did not tell me?'

'I did. You thought you knew all about it, and you did not even take the trouble to inquire before you signed. Don't talk about honour, Doctor, because in the City there is no such thing. Clever people invented the word in order to keep other people foolish. It was a sharp practice—nothing more. I was astonished at the time that a man of your capacity shouldn't have made some inquiries before you sold your rights. Why didn't you?'

'I suppose because I trusted you.'

'Did you suppose, then, that I was benevolently giving you two hundred pounds?'

'No; I supposed we were making a fair bet. My chance of the small estate—what is it?—a thousand a year?—was worth, I thought, what you offered.'

'Never think in business—never trust—never believe any man.'

'If there is no honour there is, I suppose, some kind of fair play between men who deal? Do you call your play fair?'

'Yes, I do. You might have got the same information as I got. But never mind fair play. The estate is mine, and I shall send word to the tenants that they are to pay their rent to me. Do you dispute my claim?'

'I would if I could! but I fear I cannot.'

'Think of it. Take legal advice about it. As for the land, it is only a few hundred acres, and none of the tenants have paid the rent for years. They'll have to pay or go now, if there's law left in Ireland. You haven't lost anything. You couldn't have made them pay.'

'You ought to have told me——'

'Nonsense, Doctor,' Mr. Murridge interrupted him sharply. 'That is not the way in which I manage my business. I get hold of a secret, and I use it for my own advantage. I never suspected you were cousin to Lord Clonsilla till you gave me a receipted bill for medical attendance with your full name—Hugh Hyacinth Cronan. Never dreamed of it till then. But when I saw that Christian name—you are all Hyacinths, you Cronans—I began to suspect, and with a question or two put to you, and a little examination into the pedigree, and a little information about the heir presumptive, I easily arrived at the whole truth, and I used that truth to the best advantage. Why didn't you take the same trouble to protect your rights as I did to acquire them?'

The Doctor made no reply.

'Honour! He talks of honour,' Mr. Murridge went on. 'Why, what is there in the world but self-interest? Nothing but self-interest, which is the same thing as self-preservation. That is the instinct which makes men gather together, and pass laws, and make pretence of charity, and affection, and honour, and such rubbish. I've got myself to look after; I must make money to keep myself; I shall get old and past work, and I must make money to support my old age. I make money as I can. No man can say that I have robbed him.'

The Doctor at this point started, as if there might be one exception to this general statement. Mr. Murridge paused for a moment, but as nothing was said, he went on:

'I've had to take every advantage, and I have taken every advantage. Very well, then, what have you got to say to that?'

'Nothing at all,' said the Doctor, laughing ruefully. 'Nothing in the world, except that there's one kind of men who believe, and one kind who suspect. Well, I shall go back to my patients.' He rose and took his hat. 'I wonder if there's ever before been a real Viscount making up his own pills for his own patients in Camden Street, Camden Town. But I don't think I need change the door-plate.'

'Wait a moment, Doctor; wait, my Lord,' said Mr. Murridge; you must not go just yet. Dear me! Pills? Patients? For the Viscount Clonsilla? You distress me; your Lordship makes me feel as if I had not done a noble action in—in—in clearing the way for your accession. Why, if it had not been for me, you would still be plain Dr. Cronan!'

'That is true, Mr. Murridge!'

'Why, Doctor—I mean my Lord—there are a thousand ways in which a title may be used. Such a title as yours is a fortune in itself, and a certain income—a large income if properly used. Even a Knight can do something, a Baronet can do more; but a Viscount—oh, a Viscount is a tower of strength, especially in London, where all the money is——'

'Am I to let the title out at so much an hour, as if it was a donkey on Hampstead Heath?'

'Sit down for five minutes. Of all men, medical men are the least practical. Now, then, put the case plainly. You are Viscount Clonsilla, and you have no money except your professional income, and your wife's two hundred a year. You have also your children. Why, to keep up the title decently, you must have two thousand at least. It can't be done at all with less than two thousand. Shall I show you how to make that two thousand?'

'It seems worth hearing, at any rate.'

The Doctor sat down again.

'The world, my Lord, is divided into two classes—those who can use their chances, and those who can't.'

'Very good.'

'I am one of those who know how to use their chances. Now and then I get such a haul as a man who will sell his reversionary interest. But I am not ungrateful. You sold me a certainty for a song, and in return I will show you how to make money out of nothing.'

'Go on.'

'To begin with, there are always companies, good and bad, going to be started. The great difficulty with them all is to inspire confidence at the outset. For this purpose the names of noblemen—not men of business in the City—are greatly in demand. Now do you begin to see?'

'I do. The name of Lord Clonsilla would look well on a list of Directors.'

'More than that; you yourself would look well in the chair. There is nothing against you. An Irish peer with a small property who has been a physician in practice. Come, I will run you. I know of more than one company already that would rejoice in appointing you as Director; as for the qualification——'

'I think,' said the Doctor, 'that the red lamp will have to stand.'

'Then there is philanthropy. Hundreds of societies for every kind of object, and all of them wanting a Lord. An income might be made out of the May meetings alone.'

Lord Clonsilla rose and put on his hat.

'Thank you,' he said. 'There was an old proverb, *Noblesse oblige*, which I suppose is now translated, "Sell everything you can and take the highest bid." The red lamp will have to stay where it is, with the brass plate, and the less we say about the title the better. Good-morning, Murridge.'

'The man is a fool,' said Mr. Murridge when the Doctor was gone; 'he was a fool to sign away his interest for a song, and now he is going to fool away his title. Well——'

Then his thoughts returned to the cheques, and his face darkened as he turned back the papers which covered them, and saw them again all spread out before him.

At five minutes to one exactly there ran up the stairs another visitor—for the third time that morning the office-boy jammed his drawer close, and embraced the copying-press. It was hard, because the heroine was at that very moment taking her famous leap from London Bridge, followed by Spring-heel Jack. He caught her, it will be remembered, in mid-air, and gracefully swam ashore, holding her inanimate form out of the water with his strong left hand. Dick Murridge did not this time pretend to be absorbed in business, because he knew the step.

'Come out and have some dinner, Dick.'

It was a young fellow of one or two and twenty, and he had the unmistakable look of a student, not a clerk. The office-boy thought his real name must be Spring-heel Jack, because he bore himself bravely and joyously, and was so comely a young man; and because, as all young highwaymen are, he walked as if he would rather be dancing, and talked as if he would rather be singing, and he was, no doubt, extraordinarily impudent to all persons in authority.

Mr. Richard, on the other hand, would not make at all a good highwayman, because he was generally grumpy. Nobody ever heard of a grumpy highwayman. And as for a pirate, he may carry high spirits to the length of firing pistols under the table, but he may not be grumpy.

'Come along, Dick. I had to do some business in the City for my mother. I say, what a lark it is about the Title! You've heard about it, haven't you?'

'Yes, I've heard. How much money is there in it?'

'I don't know. I got home late last night, and expected a row. Instead of that, if you please, the Mater burst into tears, and cried out: "Oh, my dear son, your father turns out to be a Viscount in disguise, and you are the Honourable Hyacinth!" Upon my word,

Dick, I thought they were all gone mad together, especially as my father stood like a stuck pig—as if he was ashamed of himself—and Norah laughed and said: "You are the Honourable Daffodil, and I'm the Honourable Norah. Larry is the Honourable Larry, and Calista is the Honourable Calista." And then Uncle Joe wanted to say something too, but he was up to the back teeth by that time in gin-and-water, and he could only wag his head like Solomon.'

'There must be some money in it,' said Dick. 'People can't sit in the House of Lords without any money.'

'We sha'n't be allowed to sit in the House of Lords, it seems, at all, because we're Irish—only Irish, you know. My mother talks already of petitioning the Queen to remove the disability, which, she says, is a disgrace to the Constitution.'

'My father told me this morning. It isn't often he tells me anything. I say, Daff——' Dick grew very red—'I've forgotten something, and must go back to the office and set it right. We'll meet at the usual place in five minutes. Look here. Just cash this cheque for me as you pass the Bank, will you? Thanks. It will save me five minutes. Take it in gold.'

He thrust an envelope into his friend's hand, and ran off without waiting for an answer.

'I say,' said the Honourable Daffodil, 'why should I go to the Bank and do Dick's messages for him? I'm not his clerk, nor his father's clerk, though Norah is. Well, never mind.'

The Bank lay in his way to the Crosby Hall, where they proposed to take their dinner. He went in, presented the cheque without looking at it, received the money without counting it, dropped it in his pocket, and went his way to the dining-place, where he met Dick and gave him the money. They had their dinner, and after dinner Daffodil went back to the Hospital in Gower Street, where he received with cheerfulness the congratulations of his friends on his accession to the family honours. These congratulations took the form common among medical students, who have, it must be owned, small respect for hereditary rank. Yet, out of kindness, they promoted their comrade, and gave him several steps in the Peerage, calling him the Right Honourable His Royal Highness Prince Daffodil.

CHAPTER IV.

WHO HAS DONE THIS?

THERE were six cheques lying before Mr. Murridge. All of them were drawn for the same amount; all of them, in words and figures, were written exactly alike, save for the date. Mr. Murridge himself wrote a small and well-marked hand, very neat and clear—each letter perfectly formed—such a hand as might be expected of one who has been brought up as an engraver. Yet, for that very reason, perhaps, easier to imitate than a more common and slovenly character. The signatures of these cheques were so perfectly imitated that even Mr. Murridge himself could only tell by the dates which were his own and which were forgeries.

'Six cheques,' he said, once more comparing the dates of the cheques with his own diary, 'and four of them—these four—are forgeries. These four.'

Again he examined them closely.

They were all drawn for the same amount—namely, twelve pounds. It was an established rule with this methodical man, a rule from which he never departed, always to draw the cheques he wanted for private and domestic use for the same amount—namely, twelve pounds. This enabled him to know by a glance at the bank-book how much he spent on his household, and on salaries, wages, personal expenses, and office. Generally he drew this twelve pounds once a week. Sometimes, however, he would have to draw oftener than once a week. But a cheque for twelve pounds, with his signature, payable to bearer, would be certainly cashed without suspicion or doubt, when presented across the counter.

The forger must have known that practice of his.

Who did know it?

He had before him, besides the cheques themselves, his bank-book and his cheque-book.

'Six cheques,' he said, summing up the case, 'have been abstracted from the book; not taken altogether, which would have made a sensible gap in the book—I should have noticed that at once—but one taken here and one taken there, so as to escape observation. That was crafty. When could I have left the cheque-book lying about? and who would be in the office when I went out leaving it lying on the table? Six cheques. Four have been presented and paid. There remain two more.'

Mr. Murridge's business was not one which required the continual

paying into the Bank of money, and the drawing of many cheques. He had his bank-book made up once a month. His son generally called for it. On this occasion he had, himself, while passing the Bank that very morning, three days before the usual time, looked in and asked for it. Therefore, it was probable that the other two cheques would be both presented before the customary day of sending for the bank-book. Evidently the writer of the cheques knew perfectly well the routine of his office as well as his signature.

'It could not be the girl,' said Mr. Murridge; 'she could never imitate my handwriting to begin with;' he looked at one of her papers. It was written in a large hand, rather clumsy, for Norah belonged to the generation which has not been taught to write neatly as well as legibly, and the day of the fine Italian hand has quite gone by. Nobody who wrote such a sprawling hand as hers could imitate even distantly Mr. Murridge's neat and clearly-formed characters. 'She may have stolen the cheques for someone, though. She may have a lover. Girls will do anything for their lovers. Yet I have always thought her an honest girl. The man who trusts anyone is a Fool.'

Then he thought of the office-boy. He, too, was incapable of such an imitation. Yet he might have been put up to the job by someone outside. Very likely it was the boy. Most likely it was the boy. There was also a third person who knew the routine of the office, and his own customs, and daily rules. Mr. Murridge started when he thought of this third person, and his face hardened for a moment, but only for a moment, because the very possibility of such a thing cannot be allowed to be considered.

He placed all the cheques with the bank-book in his pocket, put on his hat, and went slowly out of the office. He was so much troubled in his mind that he actually left the safe unlocked, and all his papers lying on the table, cheque-book and all. This was a thing which he had never done before in his life. The office-boy observed this extraordinary neglect, and thought what a splendid chance would have been presented to Spring-heel Jack had his tyrant master left the safe open.

Mr. Murridge was not the kind of person to begin by crying out that he was robbed. Not at all. He would first be able to lay his hand upon the man who did it. He therefore went to the Bank Manager and requested an interview with the clerk of the pay-counter, merely stating that one of his cheques appeared to have fallen into the wrong hands.

'Can you tell me,' he asked, 'who presented these cheques?'

The clerk was paying cheques over the counter all day long, and it seemed rather a wild question to ask. But there was one thing in favour of his remembering. The only person who was ever sent to the Bank with Mr. Murridge's private cheques was his son.

'I cannot remember each one. But I remember something about them, because your son usually comes with these twelve-pound cheques.'

'Well—what do you remember?'

'Two or three of these cheques—I think three—were presented by an elderly man with white hair, a white moustache, and a foreign accent, which I noticed. Oh, and he had lost the forefinger of his right hand. He took the money each time in gold, and was a long while counting it.'

'An elderly man, with white moustache, and one finger gone. You ought to be able to recognise him.'

'I think I should know him. Another of the cheques was presented by a young lady. I should certainly know her,' said the clerk with more assurance. 'She was well dressed, and very pretty. Oh, I am sure I should know her.'

'Oh! Is there anything else you can tell me?'

'Why, there was another cheque presented half an hour ago.'

'That makes the fifth,' said Mr. Murridge. 'Who presented that?'

'A young man—I think I should know him—with light hair and a light moustache. He wore a pot-hat and a red necktie, and had a flower in his button-hole. He walked into the Bank as if the place belonged to him. First he said he would take it anyhow, and then he said he would take it in gold.'

'And the other two—these two?'

'They were presented by your son as usual. Your cheques being always for the same amount, and always being presented by your son, made me notice a difference.'

'Thank you. Observe that I have made a little alteration. This will, in future, be my signature; you see the difference? Now, if a cheque is presented without the variation, you will please detain the man who presents it, and give him in custody, and send for me. That's all.'

He went back to his office. Something was learned. A man with a foreign accent, and one forefinger gone, had presented three of the cheques. A girl, good-looking and well-dressed, presented another, and a young gentleman in a pot-hat and a red tie presented another. Not a great deal to help a detective, but something.

His son had not yet returned from his dinner, and the office-boy was still alone.

'Where is the callers'-book?' he asked.

The boy produced the book. Mr. Murridge ran his finger slowly down the list, looking for someone to suspect. There was no one. But the last name of all struck him. It was the name of Mr. Hyacinth Cronan, junior. The only visitors that morning had been those members of the Cronan family. He suddenly remembered that Hyacinth, junior, had a way of walking about as if everything belonged to him, and that he wore a pot-hat, and generally had a flower in his button-hole. Why, in a general way, the descriptions agreed, but then it was impossible.

'What did young Mr. Cronan come here for?' he asked.

'I don't know, sir. He came for Mr. Richard. They went out together at one o'clock.'

Mr. Murridge gazed thoughtfully at the boy. Young Cronan might have called at the Bank on his way.

'Go to your dinner,' he said to the boy abruptly.

The boy took his hat and disappeared in trepidation, because the history of Spring-heel Jack was in the drawer. Suppose his master was to open that drawer and discover it! This was exactly what Mr. Murridge proceeded to do. He opened the boy's drawer, and examined it very carefully. There was nothing in it at all, except a boy's penny novel, which he turned over contemptuously, taking no heed of the way in which the boy was spending the office-time. What did it matter to him what the boy did so long as he got through his work? It is not until middle-age that we learn a truth which is not one of the most important laws, yet is not without its uses; namely, that nobody cares how we do spend our time, every man being fully occupied with the spending of his own time.

When Mr. Murridge was quite satisfied in his own mind that there was nothing in the boy's drawer, he turned to his son's table. He did not in the least suspect his son, or connect him with the lost cheques, but it was his nature to search everywhere—even in the least likely places. His profession was to search for missing links. He knew that anywhere he might find a clue. He, therefore, opened the drawers. He turned over the papers, and even examined the blotting-pad, but observed nothing except that the paper was full of girls' heads, drawn in pencil—very prettily, if he had been able to examine them from an artistic point of view.

'The boy does think of something, then,' said Mr. Murridge; 'if it is only of girls. Perhaps he will wake up now.' Dick was, in

fact, wide-awake, and had been awake for a long time. 'Girls' heads! Well, he is young, and believes in women. Young men very often do.'

On the shelves round the room were piles of old letters, documents of no more use to anyone, account-books, and all the litter of thirty years' accumulation. But to search through this mass of papers, black with dust, would take too long. He stood beside his son's table, uncertain, troubled in his mind, not knowing where to look or whom to suspect. Here his son found him, when he returned from dinner at two o'clock, studying the pictures on the blotting-pad.

'Dick,' he said, 'come into my room. Shut the door. Look here. Do you know these cheques?' He looked at the cheques, and not at his son as he spoke, therefore he did not observe the change of colour which passed swiftly over the young man's face, followed by a quick hardening of the mouth. 'Do you know these cheques?'

Dick took them up one by one, and looked at them carefully, taking his time over each.

Then he replied slowly, and in a husky voice:

'Why, they are only the cheques which I have cashed for you, are they not?'

'How many cheques have you cashed for me in the last three weeks? Think!'

'Two; unless—— No; two.'

'Look at the dates. They have all been presented during the last three weeks. There is no doubt as to that fact, at least. Five out of the seven, Dick, are forgeries. I have been robbed.'

'Impossible!' said Dick.

'So I should have said yesterday. To-day I can only repeat, I have been robbed.'

Dick showed a face full of astonishment.

'Who can have robbed you?' he asked.

'That, you see, is what we have to find out; and that, by George, I will find out—I will find out, Dick!' He rattled his keys in his pocket. It is supposed that only persons of great resolution rattle their keys when they resolve. But I doubt this. 'If I do nothing for the next twelve months I will find out. I have been robbed of sixty pounds—sixty pounds! That won't break me. It isn't the money so much as the villainy which troubles me; villainy about the office; villainy at my very elbow. I'll find out who did it, Dick; and then we will see what the Law can do! Some men

when they are robbed—oh, I know it goes on every day!—sit down and hear excuses, and forgive the villain. They let the wife or the daughter come to them and cry, and then let the fellow go. That is not my sort, Dick. I will catch this fellow wherever he is—I will track him down! He had better have robbed a Bank—which is bound never to forgive—than have robbed me!'

'How—how,' asked Dick, clearing his throat again—'how do you propose to find him?'

'As for the amount, it isn't much—sixty pounds. The interest of sixty pounds at five-and-a-half per cent., which I can get if anybody can, is three pounds six shillings a year. An estate in perpetuity, worth three pounds six shillings yearly, has been stolen from me—from you, too, Dick, because I suppose——' Here he stopped to heave a sigh. The Common Lot is hard, but hardest of all to a man who is making money. 'I suppose I shall some day have to leave things behind me like everybody else. Three pounds six shillings a year! Think how long it takes to save that. A little perpetual spring, so to speak. Who has done it, you say? That is just exactly what we have to find out; and, by George, Dick, I'll never rest—never—and I'll never let you rest, either—until I have found out the man!'

Two men there are who particularly resent being robbed. The one is the man born to great possessions. He is always obliged to trust people, and he is the natural prey of the crafty, and he feels personally insulted by a breach of trust because it seems to accuse him of being credulous, soft, ignorant of the world, and easily taken in. The other is the man who spends his life in amassing small gains, and knows the value of money, what it represents, how much labour, self-restraint, and the foregoing of this world's pleasures for the sake of getting it, and very often how many tricks, and what crookedness in his pilgrimage. Mr. Murridge was the second of these men. His son watched him curiously and furtively, as he continued wrathfully threatening vengeance and relentless pursuit.

'Well, sir,' Dick asked, when the storm subsided, 'as yet you have not told me any particulars.'

'I'm coming to them. I don't know very much. But I am sure it will prove enough for a beginning. Many a great robbery has been discovered with fewer facts than these. Now listen, and get them into your head. A clever detective would very soon get a clue out of what I have learned.'

He proceeded to relate briefly what we already know.

'Have you got them all?' he asked. 'Sit down first and make a note of the dates. They may be important. Remember, an elderly man with a foreign accent, and the forefinger of the right hand gone. A girl. A young fellow with light hair, a pot-hat, a red necktie, and a swaggering air.'

'It is not much to remember,' said Dick. 'But why do you want me to remember them so particularly?'

'Because I want you to find the thief, Dick.'

The son started, and lifted his head.

'What?' he cried.

'I want you to find the villain, Dick,' Mr. Murridge repeated.

'Me to find him?'

'You shall show me the stuff you are made of. You'll never make a genealogist worth your salt. It's poor work spending every evening over a piano or out in the streets, and all day drawing girls' heads on a blotting-pad. I don't believe you are without brains, Dick. And here's a chance for you to show what you can do.'

'Yes,' said Dick thoughtfully.

'Besides, I don't want to make a fuss about the matter. Let us work quietly without the police, and the Bank and all. I don't want to arouse suspicion anywhere.'

'I see,' said Dick. 'You want the—the man who did it not to know that you have found it out already.'

'Yes. It shall be your work. It will be an occupation for you. Get to the bottom of this case. Take a week over it. Do nothing else. Think of nothing else. Lord! I should make a beautiful Detective. I've often thought that I should have liked the work. But there's no Money in it.'

Dick received these commands with profound amazement.

'Go to the police, if you like. But I would rather you kept it entirely in your own hands. Anyhow, I don't care how you find it out. Here, take the cheques; you may want them, and the cheque-book. That may be useful. Don't let the book lie about, though it would be of no use to anybody, because I've taken the precaution to stop the numbers. And as for the sixth of the stolen cheques—the one which is not yet presented—I'm in great hopes, my boy—particularly if we keep quiet and nothing is said—that the fellow will have the impudence to hand it across the counter to-day or to-morrow, when that joker will be pleased to find himself asked to step into the manager's room, while the police are called in to escort him before the Lord Mayor. And as for my

signature, I've altered it. And it will be a good long time before anybody gets the chance of getting my cheque-book again.'

'I—I will do my best,' said his son. 'At present, I confess——'

'Mind, Dick, when you've got anything that looks like a Clue, follow it up—follow it up. Never mind who it is.' He was thinking, I am ashamed to say, of his Private Secretary. 'Follow up any clue which offers, wherever it may lead you. If you find reason to suspect—even slight reason to suspect anybody—anybody, I say—find out where that person has lately spent his time, and what money he paid away, and to what people, and how he has paid it. Find out his associates. Then find out them. If necessary, make yourself chummy with them; make them believe that you want to cultivate their acquaintance; go to their places of amusement. And mind, not a word to any living creature.'

'Not a word,' his son repeated shortly. He held in his hand the cheque and the cheque-book, and he had a strange look of astonishment and hesitation.

'Why,' Mr. Murridge continued, 'what a poor, miserable, sneaking thief he must be! He had six cheques, and he could forge my name so well that even I myself cannot tell the difference. Among those seven cheques I only know my own cheques by the numbers in the book. Yet he fills them up for no more than twelve pounds each. He will be arrested, committed, tried, and sent to penal servitude for sixty pounds. Why, he might have made it a couple of hundred. But he did not know my balance, I suppose. Well, find him for me, Dick. Don't let me have the trouble of hunting him down.'

'I will do my best, sir,' said Dick; but he looked as if he thought doubtfully of the job.

'Now, there's something else, only this cursed forgery interfered. It is this Clonsilla succession. It was I, you know, who gave the Doctor his title.'

'You!'

'No other. He knew, of course, that he was a distant cousin, but he never dreamed of the title falling to him; and three years ago, Dick—three years ago, when I talked the thing over with him, and showed him that two lives stood between him and the title, he sold his reversionary rights to me—for a song. And now the reversion is mine.'

'I thought there was no money in it.'

'There's a small Irish estate, which at present is worth nothing, because the tenants won't pay. We shall see about that. But

there's a snug little English property, Dick, about which the Doctor knows nothing. It isn't a great thing, but there is a house upon it, with a few acres of land, and it stands in a good position. I think it is let for three hundred a year, and perhaps we shall be able to run up the value a bit. Three hundred pounds a year, my boy, with a good tenant, and I bought it for two hundred pounds down. I'm a landed proprietor, Dick, and you are my heir. You shall be a landed proprietor, too, by Gad, when your turn comes!'

He rubbed his hands cheerfully. His son's face, which ought to have responded with some kind of smile, only darkened more and more. That was, perhaps, his way of expressing joy.

The thought of that snug little English estate made Mr. Murridge so cheerful that he forgot his wrath concerning the forgery.

'It will be a cheering thing,' he said, recurring to the subject, 'when the Case is completed, for you to think of the man you have conducted to the Lord Mayor, and afterwards to the Central Criminal Court. For sixty pounds—the paltry sum of sixty pounds—he will have purchased the exclusive use of a white-washed apartment, rent-free, for seven, or perhaps ten years. There will be other advantages—the privilege of a whole year spent alone, with an hour's exercise every day; then a good many years of healthy employment, without any beer, or wine, or tobacco, and no amusements and no idle talk. And when, at last, he comes out, it will be to a world which will turn its back upon him for the rest of his natural life. The hand of Justice is heavy in this country on the man who invades the rights of Property; but the hand of Society is ten times as hard—ten times as hard. So it ought to be—so it ought to be. For, if Property is not held sacred, who would try to make money?'

Dick went back to his own desk, bearing with him the cheques and the cheque-book. He sat down and began to think. He had a week in which he would be left quite undisturbed to find out the forger. A good deal may be done in a week. If he failed, his father would take up the case for himself—his father, whose scent was as keen as a bloodhound's, and whose pursuit would be as unrelenting. He had a week! For the moment he could not think what was to be done; he had no clue, perhaps; or, perhaps he was not satisfied as to the best way of following up a clue. Perhaps the problem presented itself to him as it would to an outsider. Given a robbery and a forgery. The robbery must have been committed when Mr. Murridge was out—that was certain; the forgery

must have been committed by someone well-acquainted with the custom of drawing twelve-pound cheques as well as able to imitate a signature. The only persons who had access to the inner office in Mr. Murridge's absence were himself, Norah Cronan, the office-boy, and the housekeeper; but the latter only when the offices were closed and on Sundays. Suspicion might fall upon any of these four, but especially upon himself and upon Norah. He put this quite clearly to himself. As for the office-boy, no one would suspect him—he was too great a fool even to think of such a crime; and the housekeeper, too, was out of the question. There remained, as the most likely persons to be suspected, himself and Norah.

Having got so far, he remained here, unable to get any farther; in fact, he came back to it again and again.

'Myself and Norah,' he thought. 'It must lie between us two—it must lie between us!'

The office-boy watched him curiously. From his position at the other side of the fireplace he looked, so to speak, over Dick's shoulder, and could watch him unseen and unsuspected. There were certain special reasons—in fact, they were concealed in the pocket of his jacket—why the office-boy thought that something was going to happen. There were other reasons, such as a great increase in Mr. Richard's sulkiness, a jumpy manner which had lately come over him, and his rudeness to Miss Cronan, which made this intelligent boy believe that something was going to happen very soon. Then Mr. Murridge had been shut up with his son for three-quarters of an hour. That meant things unusual. And now Mr. Richard, instead of drawing girls' heads, was sitting in moody thought.

You know how strangely, when the mind is greatly exercised and strained, one remembers some little trifle, or forgets some little habitual thing, such as brushing the hair or putting on a collar. Dick's eyes fell upon his pocket-book, which lay upon his desk. It was a diary, one of the diaries which give a certain small space for every day in the year and a pocket for letters. It belonged, like his purse and his bunch of keys, essentially to his pocket. Yet he could not remember when he had last carried it in his pocket. Consider, if you are accustomed to a bunch of keys in your pocket, you do not feel their presence, but yet you miss them when they are no longer there. Dick became suddenly conscious that for some time—perhaps an hour—perhaps a whole day—perhaps more—he had not felt the presence of the pocket-book. But his mind

had been so much occupied by certain pressing anxieties which beset him about this time, that he had noticed the absence of the book half-consciously. Now that he saw it lying on his table he snatched it up, and began turning over the pages, at first confidently and then hurriedly, as one looks for something lost. There was something lost. He shook out the leaves; he looked through them again; he searched the empty pocket. Then he searched his own pockets.

The boy behind him watched with a broad grin of satisfaction, as if he understood the cause of this distress.

Then Dick sprang from his chair and looked under the table, on the floor, in the blotting-pad, in the letter-rack, and in the drawers. Then he began all over again. No Greek mime ever expressed more vividly the anxiety, dismay, and terror of one who has lost a thing of vital importance. The boy felt as if he should like to roll on the floor and scream.

'Have you picked up anything, you boy?' Dick turned upon him fiercely, so that he was fain to repress the smile upon his lips and the light of joy in his eye. 'Come here, you little devil!'

The boy obeyed with composed face, and, in fact, with considerable trepidation, because there was something in his jacket-pocket which he ardently desired to conceal from Mr. Richard.

'Have you picked up anything at all?' he asked again.

'What is it?' the boy asked by way of reply. 'Is it money dropped?'

'You measly little devil! Why don't you answer? Have you picked up anything? It is something of no importance to anybody—a bit of pink paper.'

'I haven't picked up nothing,' replied the boy sullenly.

'I've a great mind to search you,' said Dick, catching him by the coat-collar. 'You're as full of tricks as you can stick.'

'Search me, then. Oh yes! Search me. I'll go and call the Guv'nor, and ask him to search me, if you like. You just lemme go, or I'll scream, and bring out the Guv'nor and ask him to search me.'

Dick dropped his coat-collar instantly.

'Look here,' he said. 'Do you know this pocket-book?'

'Never saw it before in my life.'

This, I regret to say, was a Falsehood. The boy had seen it many times before. Every day Mr. Richard drew that book from his pocket and wrote in it, and then put it back.

'You came here before me this morning. Was it on my desk when you came?'

'Don't know. Never saw it there. Never saw it before in my life.'

Dick began to think that he was wrong. The book must have been in his pocket; he must have taken it out without thinking. But where was the——

'You boy,' he said, 'if you are lying, I'll break every bone in your body.'

Modern Boy is so constituted that this threat does not terrify him in the least. Nobody's bones are broken nowadays. It is true that every father has the right to whack and wollop his own son, and sometimes does it, but with discretion, otherwise the School Board Officer will find him out.

'I don't care. Call the Guv'nor, and tell him what you want. I dun know what you've lost. What is it, then?'

'I've lost a—a paper. It was in this book.'

'What sort of a paper?'

Dick made no reply. Perhaps the lost paper would be in his own room. Stung by the thought that it might be lying about somewhere, he put on his hat and turned hurriedly away.

'What sort of a paper was it?' asked the boy. 'If you give over threatening, I'll help look for it. What sort of paper?'

'Hold your tongue. You can't help. I've looked everywhere.'

'Perhaps,' said the boy persuasively—'perhaps it was the housekeeper.'

Very few people think of the housekeeper. Yet there is always one in every house let out for offices. She is always elderly—nobody ever heard of a housekeeper in the City dying—and she is generally a grandmother with a daughter, also a widow, and three or four little children—they are always little. Grandmothers and children always, in the City, remain at the same age. All the week long the children are hidden away somewhere in the basement; on Saturday afternoons and Sundays they come up and have a high old time, because the front-door is closed, and the place is deserted, and the whole house is their own. Then the office-doors are thrown open and the children run races in the most sacred apartments, and open all the drawers, and ransack their contents, and make themselves acquainted with the clerk's secrets and the Chief's hidden decanter of sherry, and read all the private journals, and pick up the odd lead-pencils, and provide themselves with steel-pens, penholders, blotting-paper, note-paper, letter-paper, foolscap, india-rubber, envelopes, and, in ill-regulated offices, with postage-stamps as well.

Dick rang the bell for the housekeeper. She declared, which was quite true, that she had found nothing, and carried away no papers. She had children in the house, but, unlike children in some offices she could name, her children were never allowed in her offices on Saturday and Sunday.

So she withdrew again, and the lost paper was no nearer recovery.

Perhaps Dick had left it in his own room at home. Pierced by the thought, as with an arrow, he seized his hat and left the office.

Then the office-boy sat down in Mr. Richard's chair, and put his hands into his trousers-pockets, and spread his legs out, and grinned from ear to ear.

'It's coming fast,' he said. 'Lor'! I wish he had searched me. What would the Guv'nor have said when this little envelope was found in one jacket-pocket, and this envelope was found in the other jacket-pocket? And what would Mr. Richard have said? I'm a measly little devil, am I? And Miss Cronan, she's a Sapphier, which rhymes with Liar, and goes with Ananias. I've often heard a boy called Ananias, but never a girl called Sapphier. Sophy I know, but not Sapphier.'

He could not resist the temptation of drawing out the two envelopes and looking at the contents.

'Shall I,' he said, 'knock at the Guv'nor's door and give him these two envelopes at once, or shall I wait? I think I'll wait. Ha! The time will come. Then I shall jump upon him. Then I shall make him wriggle. Then I shall see him curl.'

This boy had not read the History of Spring-heel Jack in vain.

But neither at home nor anywhere could Dick Murridge find that lost piece of paper, and the loss of it filled him with anxiety.

CHAPTER V.

A STEADY YOUNG MAN'S EVENING.

THAT secluded corner of London which lies hidden behind the three great stations, and is separated from the rest of the world by the Hampstead Road on the west, and the St. Pancras Road on the east, contains many houses, and harbours many families, whose histories, were they known, are as romantic and wonderful, and as deeply laden with pathos and interest, as any Moated Grange or Shield of Sixteen Quarterings.

One of these houses—for reasons which will be immediately obvious it is not necessary or advisable to name the road in which

it stands—is devoted, so to speak, to the nightly conjuring of the Emotions among those who are privileged to enter its walls. No Melodrama ever placed upon the boards of a Theatre arouses more fiercely and more certainly the passions of Terror, Anxiety, Rage, Despair, and Frantic Joy than the simple passes of the great Magician who practises nightly in this house. It is nothing more than a tavern—a simple Corner House, with a signboard and a Bar of many entrances. Yet it has pretensions somewhat above the common, for at the side is another door, and this is inscribed with the legend, 'Hotel Entrance.' It is a quiet and orderly house, with a family trade, in a quarter where beer is truly the national beverage, and with regular takings. There are never any rows in this house; the landlord has no occasion to persuade the policeman to partial blindness, and the renewal of the license has never been opposed.

The Spells, Magic and Mystery, are worked on the first-floor, which is let off for a club which meets here every evening, all the year round, except on Sundays. The members would meet on Sundays as well if it were permitted. It is not a club of working-men, nor can it truthfully be called a club of gentlemen, unless the widest possible license is allowed in the use of that term. On the other hand, the members would be very much offended if they, collectively, were addressed otherwise than as gentlemen; and they all wore black coats all day long, which is, in a way, the outward livery and badge of gentlemen. Yet very few among them possess such a thing as a dress-coat, so that, perhaps, they are only gentlemen by courtesy. It is, further, a Proprietary Club. There is no Committee of Management; there is no Ballot; there is no Election of Members; there is no book for Candidates' names; there is nothing but the Proprietor. He alone admits the Members, regulates the time of opening and closing, establishes the tariff for drinks and tobacco, and is the Autocrat, Despot, and Absolute Ruler of the Club. There is not even any entrance-fee or subscription. Yet the greatest precautions are taken in the admission of members, and a man stands without, to keep off persons who have not received the right of entry, and, perhaps, to prevent the Club being disagreeably surprised.

At seven o'clock the Club opens every evening. It is not a political club, because Politics are never touched upon; nor is it a Social Club, for the members do not converse together after the manner of ordinary mortals; nor is it a club founded for the advance of any Cause, or for the promotion of any Art, or for any Scientific or Intellectual objects whatever. Yet it is a Club where

conversation is always animated, and even interjectional, though sometimes monotonous. It is also absorbing, and it brings all heads bent together, it makes all eyes strained ; everybody's face is anxious and eager ; and it is so witty, so clever, so biting and epigrammatic, that at everything that is said some laugh and shout, and some sigh, weep, and even curse. It is, lastly, a club which contains everything which the members want to make them completely happy, though, unfortunately, the members cannot always get what they want, and what they come for.

At eight o'clock in the evening the club is generally in full swing. Anyone looking in at that hour would find a group of men sitting at a table, or arrangement of tables, in the middle of the room, lit by half a dozen candles.

The men would be fully absorbed in their occupation, with faces as grave as if they were in church, and eyes as anxious as if they were about to have a tooth out.

There were eight or nine small tables about the room, each provided with a pair of candles, and each occupied by two men. There was a sideboard, or buffet, with decanters and glasses, cigars, cigarettes, and the usual trimmings, behind which stood a young lady of barmaidenly loveliness. For the look of the thing, there were champagne-bottles, but the customary drink was whisky or bottled stout. A dozen men were standing together about the bar, drinking, or talking to the girl. They were those who had come too late for a place, and were waiting their turn. The atmosphere was thick and heavy with tobacco-smoke. There was also an open piano, but no one regarded it.

Among the tables and those who sat out there moved continually a man rather small of stature, but of good proportions, of straight and regular features, and very carefully dressed. He was now advanced in life, being perhaps sixty years of age. His hair was white, and he wore a heavy white moustache. A cigarette was always between his lips ; his voice was soft, gentle, and he seemed to have something friendly to say to every one of the members ; his smile was kindly ; his eyes benevolent ; he laughed easily and musically ; and there was not a man in the room who did not believe that the Count was his own private, personal, and particular friend. They called him, to show their great respect, the Count. He did not himself claim the title, though, perhaps, he was a Count in his own country, or even a Prince, for he was by birth an Italian, and his card bore the simple name of Signor Giuseppe Piranesi. He had lost the forefinger of his right hand—in a duel, it was

understood, about a lady; no doubt a Princess. Everybody believed that the Count had been, in his day, a terrible breaker of ladies' hearts.

In plain words, the place is a gambling club, run by this Italian who was so good a friend to all the members. Not, it must be understood, exactly a Crockford's, but a suburban second-class club, the members of which are chiefly tradesmen dwelling in and about the neighbourhood, and clerks, young and old; in which the stakes are in silver, not in gold; and the group in the middle of the room were playing baccarat, while the smaller tables were occupied by those who played écarté, or any other game of two at which money may be lost or won.

The rich classes have their gambling clubs; the workmen have their clubs where they gamble—a distinction without much difference—in these days of equality. Why should not the middle classes, the great, virtuous, honourable middle classes, have their gambling clubs as well?

The game of baccarat, as, perhaps, everyone may not know, is played at an arrangement of three card-tables set side by side, the middle one being generally much smaller than the other two. Three players sit at each of the large tables, and two—the dealer and his partner, who keeps the bank—sit at the small table opposite to each other. The dealer gives two cards to the player on his right, two cards to the player on his left, and two to his partner. Before the cards are turned up every player places his stake before him. The amount is limited, and in this small and unpretending coterie the limit was, one is ashamed to say, five shillings only, most of the players hazarding only a shilling. The two players who receive the cards play each for his own table, the dealer for himself. The stakes placed, each player looks at his hand. If he has a Natural—that is, a combination of pips, making in the aggregate, eight or nine—he shows his cards, and all the players at his table are paid by the dealer. If the dealer has a Natural he is paid at once. If the player has not a Natural, he can order one more card. The players on the right and left of the dealer go on playing so long as they beat the dealer; as soon as one of them is beaten he resigns in favour of the man next to him.

There are other rules in this game, but these are sufficient. There is no play in it; all is as the true gambler loves to have it, pure chance. The player is left to the one thing dear to his heart, the exercise of judgment, prudence, caution, audacity, and perseverance in the amount of his stake. It seems as if the chances were

equal all round, but somehow the dealer is supposed to be in the least desirable position, and the players have to take turns to be dealer.

The men at the tables in this vulgar little gambling-den were mostly young, some of them mere boys, who had not long left school, young clerks in the City, who brought their shillings in the hope of turning them into pounds, and played with flushed cheeks, and quivering lips, and eager eyes. Some were middle-aged, and appeared to be, as they were, tradesmen—shopkeepers in the Euston Road or the Camden Road. Their shops were left to the care of their wives and daughters, or to shop-girls, while they came night after night to tempt fortune at the green table. The humane person feels a profound pity when he considers the position of the small shopkeeper, because he has to fight such a desperate fight against want of capital, want of credit, competition, and the Stores, and because the Devil is always whispering in his ear, 'They all cheat. You must cheat, too, if you wish to get on.' Yet it must be owned that the small shopkeeper is not always the highest type of Englishman, and in many cases it would be better for him to remain in the cold but wholesome discipline of clerkly or shopmanly servitude, when, perhaps, he would never be tempted to go lusting after the fever joys of gaming. Some of the players were quite old men, whose fingers trembled as they made their game, whose hands could hardly hold the cards, who clutched at the table when the players turned them up, and laughed when they won, and groaned miserably when they lost. They were as fierce and as eager as the boys—more eager, because, of all the joys in life, this was all that was left to them. At the table they could feel once more the blood coursing through their veins, the delirious trembling of hope and fear, the bounding pulse of victory. Play made these old men young again. At the West-End the old men, whose work is done, play whist every day. At this club at St. Pancras they play baccarat. The principle is much the same, save that in Pall Mall skill is joined with chance, and the game is not altogether blind.

A mean and vulgar hell. When the boys have lost their money, they will go away and get more—somehow; by borrowing, by pledging, even by stealing and embezzling. Their mistress craves perpetually for money. Those who love her must bring money in their hands. No other gifts will do; she must have gold and silver coins, and if they want to woo her, they must find these coins somehow. She never asks how they find the coins; she has no suspicions, and she has no scruples. Whether the money is honestly earned or stolen matters nothing to her.

Therefore there will come a day in the life of one or two young men now torn by the raptures and anxieties with which the goddess rewards her votaries, when there will be an emigrant-ship in the London Docks ready to be towed out, and on the deck, among the steerage passengers, a lad, one of these lads, standing with a look, half of shame, half of defiance. He has gambled away home and friends, character and place. When the bell rings, and his father wrings his hand for the last time, he will break down with tears, in thinking of what he has done and what he has lost. Yet the next day, out in the Channel, he will be courting his mistress again, with an old pack of cards and another youth like-minded.

Or there is a worse ending still for one or more of these young men—an ending in a Police Court, where a young man stands in the Shameful Dock, and is committed by the Magistrate. As for this middle-aged tradesman here, who comes here every night to play away his profits and his capital, his credit, character, substance, and stock, presently his shop will be shut, and, with wife and children, this gentleman will go away and vanish into the unknown depths known only to the district visitor, the Charity Organization Society, and the rent-collector. They will very likely rescue the children and alleviate the lot of the wife; but the man's case is hopeless, because, at every depth, there is a den somewhere for those who have a penny to risk and to lose.

As for the old men, they will go on as long as they can drag themselves up the stairs, and I suppose the time is not far distant when, perforce, they must cease to come, and obey reluctantly the summons to go away to a place where, perhaps, there are no games of chance.

Among the players at the middle table sat Dick Murridge.

His father was right in mistrusting a boy who went about his work like a machine, and seemed to have no passion, no pursuit, no ambition—who committed no small follies, and had none of the headlong faults of ardent youth. Dick had a Pursuit. It was absorbing and entrancing: he followed it with ardour every evening of the week. It was a pursuit which brought into play, to a very remarkable degree, the maxims which his father had taught him. It requires, for instance, no Law of Honour, except that if you conceal cards, or play false, or do not pay up, you are outkicked. It makes no foolish pretence about Friendship, Philanthropy, Charity, or any stuff of that kind. At the baccarat-table every man is for himself. No skill is wanted; no dull working and daily practice in order to acquire dexterity, which would not be of any use: the whole object of the pursuit is to win money.

Of all the eager and noisy crew who sat at that table, there was not one who was more absorbed in the game than Dick Murridge. The others shouted and swore great oaths when they won or lost. Dick made no sign. His face betrayed no emotion. The quiet Gambler is the most determined and the most hopeless.

By the side of Dick sat—alas!—young Daffodil Cronan. He was by no means a silent player. His face was flushed with excitement, his hair tossed; his lips were parted, and at every turn of the cards he gasped, whether it brought him victory or loss; only, if he won, he laughed aloud.

The Count stood watching the game. He was a most obliging Proprietor. If anyone wanted to shirk his turn at holding the Bank, which is considered less advantageous than playing against the Bank, the Count would take it for him, smiling cheerfully whether he lost or won. Or, while he stood out, if anyone wanted to play écarté, poker, monty, bézique, euchre, piquet, sechs und sechzig, two-handed vingt-et-un, or any other game whatever, the Count would play with him. He knew all games. He was equally ready to cut through the pack for shillings, or to toss for sovereigns, should any of his members desire it. A most obliging Proprietor. Sometimes he lost and sometimes he won. Whether he lost or whether he won he laughed gently, as if it mattered nothing to him. As for his fairness at play, no one entertained the least doubt. One would like to have the history of such a man. If he would write down his autobiography it would be instructive. But this he will not do unless he be allowed to tell it in his own way, as Mrs. George Anne Bellamy and Madame du Barry have related their lives. The autobiography of the Count would be, I am sure, as interesting as that of Barry Lyndon.

Other attentions he lavished upon the members. If, as sometimes happened, one of them rose hastily from the table, with haggard face and despairing eyes, the loser of everything, the benevolent Proprietor would lend him half a sovereign, or half a crown, according to the age and social position of that member, and with regard to the amount of his losings. He would also advise him to go away, and to tempt fortune no more that night against a run of bad luck; and he would prescribe for him, mix and administer, a restorative in whisky-and-water, on the strength of which the patient would go straight home, and go to bed, and feel no pangs of remorse and terror until the morning. Or, if one of the members was not despairing, but only reckless, he would lend him money to go on with, taking a note of acknowledgment in

return. He was so benevolent that his pocket-book was stuffed with these notes.

It was not known how the Count made the club pay. Perhaps the notes of acknowledgment for money lent included interest; perhaps he steadily won; if he did, it was clearly only by those games, such as écarté, which require some skill. But no one knew.

This evening, it might have been remarked that the Count was a good deal engaged in watching Dick's play. He observed two or three things. When Dick won he put his winnings into his pocket without a word or a sign of satisfaction. When he lost he saw the stake raked up without the least emotion. Further, he observed that Dick lost nearly every time. The luck was dead against him from the beginning. And this circumstance afforded him a certain satisfaction, but why, one could hardly explain.

The evening went on; the windows were thrown wide open. But the air grew intolerably close and heavy; the players were more serious and more silent. No one, except Daffodil, laughed, and then the others turned upon him looks of reproach and wonder. Those who had left the table sat moodily without, thinking over their losses or whispering with the Count; and at the small tables there was heard the continued cries of 'King—Vole—Trick—More cards—Play,' in the quick, decided tones of those who play for money and play quickly.

At ten o'clock Dick rose from the table and laid his hand upon his friend's shoulder.

'Come,' he whispered; 'they will be expecting you at home.'

The boy rose unwillingly. He was winning, and for the first time in his life his pocket was heavy with silver. But Dick dragged him from the table.

'My young friends,' said the Count, as they left the table, 'you leave us too early. But perhaps it is best to be home in good time. I hope you have not lost?'

He spoke very good English, but with a slightly foreign accent, and he spoke as if he really did take the deepest interest in their fortune.

'As for me,' cried Daffodil eagerly, 'I've won a pot. Look here!' He pulled out a handful of shillings. 'It's glorious!'

The Count laughed encouragingly.

'Good,' he said; 'very good! Luck is always with the boys. At your age I should have broken all the banks. Come again soon. I love to see the boys win. And you, friend Richard?'

'It doesn't matter to anyone except myself,' Dick replied gloomily, 'whether I win or lose.'

'He is silent,' said the Count. 'I watch him at his play. When the others laugh or win they curse; he is silent. No one can tell from his face whether he has won or lost. A good player should be silent.—Will you drink before you go?'

Daffodil went to the bar and had a drink; Dick refused.

'Do you want another advance, my friend?' asked the Count.

Dick shook his head, but with uncertainty.

'What is the good?' he asked. 'My infernal luck follows me every night. I'm cleaned out again.'

'Dear me! I am very sorry. Let me see your account. You have given me three cheques, each for twelve pounds. They were passed'—he glanced quickly at Dick's face—'without question.'

'Why the devil should they be questioned?' Dick asked.

'Ah, my friend, yours is the face for the gambler. You can keep your countenance, whatever happens. It is a great gift. Steady eyes—look me in the face—full, steady eyes and fingers'—he took Dick's hand in his, and squeezed the fingers critically—'fingers that are sensitive and quick. Sometimes I think that fingers are alive. Why, if a devil was to enter into one of these fingers, and persuade it to—well, to imitate another person's handwriting——'

'What do you mean?' asked Dick.

'Steady eyes—steady eyes! Why, that the finger would imitate that writing to perfection. Well, as to our account. You owe me, my young friend, twenty-four pounds. Shall I make you another advance? Well, come here to-morrow morning at eleven. Can you spare the time? Come! We shall be quite alone, and I have something to say. Steady eyes, delicate fingers, hard and cold face. These are the gifts of the true gambler.'

'What then?' said Dick.

'What, indeed! I fear they are gifts which may be wasted. Some day, when you are in trouble—some day, when you want money——'

'I always want money.'

'You are in trouble also, my friend; I read trouble in your face.' He dropped his voice to a whisper—a soft, friendly, murmurous whisper. 'You are in trouble now. Confide in me. Those three cheques, now——'

'No, no! The cheques are all right, I tell you. Why do you keep harping upon the cheques?'

'I rejoice to hear it; I was afraid you might have been deceived. But you are in trouble.'

'I didn't say that; I said I wanted money. If you can teach me how to make it—— But you can't, else you would make it for yourself. Why should you teach me?'

The Count looked at his mutilated hand.

'I could make it for myself once, but I am—I am old, perhaps. I know how it is to be made, easily, by handfuls, and I can teach you how to do it, too.'

'Nobody ever gives anything. What am I to pay for the knowledge?'

'Come to-morrow, and I will tell you what you are to pay. Come here at eleven o'clock, when we shall be quite alone, and—— Ah, here is my new friend. My dear boy, I rejoice when my young friends win. It is our turn to lose. We are the old boys. The world of pleasure is all for the young. Come here and win more—win all we have! Then go and spend your money gaily. There are plenty of pretty girls who love boys with money. Go—sing—love—dance—drink! Then come here again and make more money. Happy boy—happy youth!'

'Come along, Dick,' said Daffodil, laughing. 'I have won fifty shillings, at least. Hooray! What a splendid game it is!'

CHAPTER VI.

THE TEMPTATION.

THE soft voice of the man, his measured speech, his calmly prophetic assurance that Trouble was on the way, affected Dick Murridge at this juncture of his affairs very disagreeably. He could know nothing. Yet he spoke as if he knew.

For now the Trouble was actually come. In a few days his father would expect something from him: a Report, a Clue, a Theory—something which might be followed up. If there was nothing, he would himself take up the Case. 'Come to me,' said the Count, 'when the Trouble falls upon you. Come to me to-morrow, and let us talk.'

He kept that appointment; he found the Count in the Club-room, which, by day, with its tables put together and covered with a green baize cloth, looked like a Board Room, or a Room for the Coroner and the Jury, or, at least, like a Room for a Friendly Lead.

'So,' said the Count, 'you are here. I expected you. Has the Trouble come?'

'There is no Trouble coming,' Dick replied.

'It will come very soon if it has not already come. However, let us talk business. You owe me twenty-four pounds. You have borrowed from time to time sixty pounds, and you have paid me in three cheques thirty-six pounds. You want to borrow more. Last night you lost ten pounds or thereabouts.'

'How do you know?'

'I watched you all the evening. That is simple, is it not? Do you wish to borrow more money?'

Dick made no reply. He had lost more than ten pounds out of the cheque which Daffodil cashed for him—there was, in fact, half a crown left. Half a crown out of twelve pounds!

'All the young men who come here fall into Trouble, sooner or later, my dear Richard. I have seen your Trouble coming for a long time. What do you expect? You want to enjoy life. Very well then. Nature says that those who enjoy life must have money. It is reasonable. Those who have money are kings. Those who have none are slaves. If you win you spend your winnings on your pleasures. If you lose, you—well, you get into Trouble.'

'I never do win,' said Dick.

'My friend, listen carefully.' The Count sat down and drew his chair quite close to Dick. 'I have watched you for many nights, I say to myself, "I want a pupil. Here is one who may be a credit to me." Very good; as for the others, I let them go. They may help themselves; but I am willing to help you. For you are different. I have found that you are hard and you are brave; you have no foolish, soft heart, and you have fingers—beautiful fingers, delicate, full of sense and life, which can be taught to handle cards.'

'What do you mean?' Dick cried, with the feeling of attraction which a butterfly feels towards the candle.

The first lesson was the most wonderful thing which Dick ever learned. Yet it was a very small thing; nothing but a simple method of turning up the king whenever he was wanted, and a simple explanation of the fact that in professional gambling the outsider plays with the man who knows how to turn up the king, and therefore must, in the long-run, lose.

'Come again to-morrow,' said the Count; 'meanwhile practise. Oh, I can teach you! But this is nothing. Understand that what you have learned to-day is only the very beginning of the Art—

the first elements. Persevere, my son, and I will place an unheard-of fortune in your hands.'

'What am I to give you for it?'

'That you will presently discover. I shall not teach you much, you may be sure, unless we understand each other.'

The lesson lasted until about three o'clock. It was so strange and so delightful that the young man actually forgot the Trouble. That came back to him the moment he left the house.

It was Friday. He spent the afternoon thinking. He called it thinking. In reality it was putting before himself in lively imagination all the terrors of the situation. In the evening he went to the club. The Count lent him three pounds, and he won a small sum. But how could he hope to win back all he owed, and, if he did, how would that help him with those cheques?

On Saturday morning he spent another hour or two with the Count, and learned more. He now understood for the first time that he who plays at a public table has to do with a man who must win as often as he pleases, or as often as he dares, because he can do what he likes with the cards. For some reason of his own, the Count was teaching him the secrets of the cards. The Saturday afternoon he spent in 'thinking' as before. And on Saturday evening he went again to the club, and again he won; but not much. On Sunday morning he awoke full of apprehension. Four more days; he must invent or make up something which would keep his father quiet. He was so full of fears that he resolved to tell everything to Calista.

It has been seen that he told her nothing.

The reason was, partly that he bethought him, on the way, of the pain and shame with which she would hear his story; and partly because, as he went on the top of an omnibus from Camden Town to the Mansion House, and again from the Mansion House down the Commercial Road, there went with him a Voice. There may have been Something belonging to the Voice, a disembodied Spirit, a Demon, an Afreet—I know not what. But he heard the Voice, and he did not see the Afreet.

Said the Voice: 'To-day is Sunday. You have four days—only four days. What can you make up that will satisfy your father on Thursday morning? Four days only left. If you go empty-handed he will himself take up the Case. If he does he will get to the bottom of that Case somehow or other, before he lets it go. As for the Count, you can keep him quiet. He wants you for some purpose of his own; he will teach you all he knows, and you can

buy his silence. Nobody can prove that he presented the cheques unless he comes forward. He is the only dangerous one of the three. But you must invent something—you must say something.'

He could think of nothing. He was ready with no explanation, report, result, or anything at all. In this nagging, uncomfortable manner the Voice went on all the way from Camden Town to Shadwell High Street, which is, as the crow flies, four miles and a half.

Then while Calista was talking to him, the Voice began again: 'It lies between you and Norah. It must have been either you or Norah. One of you two did it. If you are not suspected she must be.' Well, he, for his part, would not be suspected if he could avoid it by any means.

This was the reason why he spoke in so strange a fashion to Calista about what would happen. He was answering, though she did not know it, this Voice which she could not hear.

He left the Hospital, and got back to the early Sunday dinner at two. His father, for once, was almost genial, and talked freely with his son, which was unusual with him. His success in the matter of the Clonsilla inheritance pleased him. He was a landed gentleman; he had an estate in Ireland and another in England; he spoke of the land as one who has a stake in the country, and pointed out to his son that he was now an Heir and must acquire a knowledge somewhere of the Law as regards land. This was all very well; but he proceeded to talk of the robbery, and of the care with which he himself would tackle the Case if he had the time, or if he was obliged to take it into hand. This kind of talk made his son writhe.

After dinner, Mr. Murridge, on Sundays, always had a bottle of port. His son took one glass, and he himself drank the rest of the bottle. With each glass he became more pleased with his cleverness in outwitting the Doctor, and more eager for revenge in the matter of the robbery, so that he mixed up his own astuteness with the craft of the forger—his ducats with his acres.

'Find him, Dick. Find him for me—make haste!'

'I am doing the best I can,' said Dick. 'Don't hurry a man.'

'Have you got a Clue yet?' his father asked.

'Don't ask me anything. You gave me a week. I am not going to tell you anything before Thursday morning.'

'Quite right, Dick. Nothing could be better, I hate prattling before a Case is ready. But there is no harm in a word of advice. Now, if I had the conduct of the Case, I should advertise a sub-

stantial reward for the discovery of the three persons who presented the cheques; once find them and the thing is done. To be sure, there may be a ring of them—one to forge the cheques, one to steal the cheque-books, and one to present them, and they would stand by each other. I wonder Bank clerks haven't made a Ring before now. They might use it merrily for a time. But I don't think there is a Ring, Dick. The cheques have been taken out of the book, and given to someone who has copied my signature, and got the cheques cashed by people he knew. Now, one of them is a foreigner, old, and gray-headed, and wanting a forefinger on the right hand—wanting a forefinger, Dick. There can't be many men in London answering to that description, can there? Very well, that's my idea. You will act on it or not, as you please. But find him, Dick; let me put him in the Dock. Let me see him going off to his seven years. It begins with a year on a plank, I believe, and solitary confinement on bread-and-water or skilly. The Law is a righteous law which condemns one who steals hard-earned money to solitary confinement and a plank bed. But he ought to be hanged, Dick. Nothing but hanging will meet the merits of the Case.'

Presently Dick escaped, and wandered about the streets of Camden Town. One thing he clearly perceived must be done at any cost—he must keep his father from taking up the Case.

To him who thinks long enough there cometh at the last a suggestion. To Dick it seemed to come from without. It was a truly villainous and disgraceful suggestion, black as Erebus, crafty as the Serpent, and cowardly as the Skunk. It had been whispered in his ear at the Hospital. Now it was whispered again.

'You must accuse someone. It is your only chance. If you acknowledge that you have failed, your father will immediately take up the Case himself. He will advertise and offer a reward. He is quite sure to find out the truth. You must accuse someone. Whom will you accuse?

'It must be someone who has access to the office; someone who knows your father's habits in drawing cheques; someone who would get at his signature easily.

'No. Not the office-boy. There cannot be a proof or a shadow of proof against the office-boy. Who else comes to the office?' Dick waited while that question was put to him a hundred times. 'Who else but Norah? There is no other. Norah Cronan.'

Dick Murridge had known this girl all his life. When she was five and he eight, they played together. When she was ten and he

thirteen he teased and bullied her after the manner of boys; when she was sixteen and he nineteen he began to perceive that she was beautiful; only a fortnight before he had told her that he loved her. And now he could harbour the thought of accusing her in order to save himself. Said the Voice in his ear:

'The first rule of life is self-preservation. Before that everything must give way. A man must save himself at any sacrifice. Honour, Love, Friendship, Truth—what are they? Shadows. The first thing is self-preservation.'

His father had taught him this precept a hundred times. What was it he was going to do but to preserve himself?

How would his father take it? Why, that made the thing all the more easy. She was, if anyone, a favourite with him. He trusted her more than any other person in the world—more than his own son. If he interested himself or cared about anyone it was about this clever, quick, and industrious girl-clerk, who for seventy-five pounds a year did the work of two men-clerks at double the salary. If his father could only be persuaded that it was Norah, he would probably say nothing more about it. He would forgive her, and all would go on as before. Here Dick was wrong. Mr. Murridge and men who, like him, trust few, and those not unreservedly, are far more dangerous if they are betrayed than men who trust lightly and easily.

He thought over this villainy all the evening. The longer he thought of it the more easy and the more likely it appeared. He saw a way of making the charge plausible and possible. He made up his mind what he would do and how he would do it. At the same time he resolved to keep on with the Count. It might be well, in case things turned out badly, to listen to the proposals, at which he kept hinting, with promises of wealth unbounded.

It was past ten when he went home. He took his candle, and, without seeing his father, went straight to his own room.

'Of course,' he said, 'I would not have her tried, or sent to prison, or anything. It will be quite enough for my father to think she's done it. They can't send her to prison, or anyone else, if there are no forgeries to convict with.' Then suddenly came a really brilliant idea · 'They must have a forgery to go upon. Suppose a man says that a cheque was cashed which he did not draw, very well then, where is your cheque? Produce your cheque.' He did produce a little heap of cheques and a cheque-book. He placed them in the fireplace; he struck a match; and he saw them quickly consume into ashes.

'There,' he said, 'where's your proof now? Where is your forgery? The worst that can happen to Norah now, when she says I gave her the cheque, is not to be believed. It's all right now. They can't prove anything.'

He was so pleased, pacified, and easy after this act of decision, that he went to bed, and for the first time for many weeks slept soundly, and without any apprehensions, nightmares, or dreadful dreams.

CHAPTER VII.

'DOWN WITH LANDLORDS!'

'WE have now,' said Uncle Joseph, regarding his first glass of gin-and-water with discontented looks—'we have now, Maria, been members of the Peerage—actually of the Peerage—the Peerage of the Realm, for nearly a week. Yet I see no change.'

'No one has called,' said her Ladyship. 'I have put on my best gown every night. But no one has thought fit to take the least notice of us.'

'Where is the Coronet? Where are the Robes? Where is the Star? Where is the Collar?'

The Doctor silently filled his pipe and went on reading his evening paper, taking no notice of these complaints. Yet it did strike him as strange that a man should succeed to a Peerage with so little fuss.

'No message from the Queen,' Uncle Joseph continued; 'no officer of the House of Lords with congratulations from that August Body; no communications from Provincial Grand Lodge; no deputations from a loyal tenantry; no ringing of bells. Maria, in the whole course of my experience among the titled classes I never before saw such a miserable Succession.'

'Miserable indeed!' said her ladyship.

'The reason,' continued Uncle Joseph, 'is not difficult to find. They are waiting, Maria, for the Banquet. How can a noble Lord succeed without a Banquet? You can't do anything without it. Why, if you initiate a little City clerk, you have a Banquet over it. If you raise a man to the dazzling height of Thirty-Third, you must celebrate the occasion with a Banquet. And here we succeed to the rank of Viscount, and not even a bottle of champagne. Gin-and-water, in the house of the Right Honourable the Viscount Clonsilla!'

There was a full attendance of the House, so to speak. The Honourable Hyacinth was present; the Honourable Norah, with

Mr. Hugh Aquila, had just returned from an evening walk among the leafy groves of Camden Town's one square; the Honourable Terry, Larry, and Pat were, as usual, quarrelling over a draught-board.

'Well, my dear,' said the Doctor at last, 'what did you expect?

'I expected Recognition. I thought that our brother Peers would call upon us.'

'What have we received, Maria?' said Uncle Joseph. 'The outstretched hand of Brotherhood? Not at all. Cold neglect.'

'We may belong to the Irish Peerage,' said the Doctor, 'but, remember, if you please, that I am still, and am likely to remain to the end of the Chapter, a General Practitioner, with a large practice and a small income, of Camden Town. It will be a proud distinction, no doubt, to reflect that we are the only titled people in Camden Town. Well, we must be contented with the pride. You may add to the Alderman's robe, my dear, your coronet, when it comes along.'

'We ought,' said Uncle Joseph firmly, 'to assert ourselves. There ought to be a Banquet.'

'At the funeral to-day,' the Doctor continued, 'there was not a single mourner except myself, and Daff, and Hugh, who went with us. Not one. The old Lord seems to have outlived all his friends. He left no will, so that all the property, whatever it is, entailed or not, should have come to me, but for an accidental circumstance which you ought to learn at once.'

'As the old Lord is buried,' said Uncle Joseph, 'the time has come for action; of course it would have been unseemly to rejoice before the funeral. Now, if my advice is thought to be worth anything in this family—the advice of a man who has shaken hands familiarly, yet respectfully, with Earls, and sat next to a Prince at a Banquet—it is, that we should, without any delay, issue invitations to a large number of our noble and illustrious brother Peers for a Banquet in robes and coronets at the Freemasons' or the Criterion. I will myself superintend the Banquet, inspect the menu—at this time of year, what with lamb, duckling, green peas, salmon, white-bait, turtle, young potatoes, early apricots and strawberries, the Banquet will be unusually choice—choice and toothsome. As for the champagne—ah!' he gasped and drank off the whole glass of gin-and-water, 'I will order it. Do not be in anxiety about the champagne, Maria. It shall be my care. When the Banquet is over, your health—you will be in the chair, Doctor—shall be taken after the loyal toasts. I will myself respond for the Craft. Then

we will give up this house, which is mean for a Viscount's Town Residence, and we will move to a Mansion in the West, where Maria can take that place in Society which she was born to adorn.'

He spoke so confidently, with so much enthusiasm, that her Ladyship murmured, and even Norah was carried away with the thought of the Family greatness. A large house in the West End, with nothing for her father to do, and Society—though it is not certain how she understood that word—seemed fitting accompaniments to a Title.

The Doctor listened gravely. Then he laughed.

'It is too ridiculous,' he said. 'I am Viscount Clonsilla. You, my dear, are Lady Clonsilla. All you boys and girls are Honourables. And, except for your mother's money, there isn't a penny in the world for any of us. What do you say, Hugh?'

'I should let the Title fall into abeyance,' said Hugh. 'I don't know why, but a title, without land or money, seems contemptible. I should give it up.'

'Never!' said Uncle Joseph, with decision. 'Give up a Title? Give up a thing that thousands are envying and longing after? Throw away a Title? You must be mad, young man. Actually refuse to enjoy your Title? You might as well go to a Banquet and pass the champagne. But it shows your ignorance. You have never been among Lords and Honourables. You don't know, young man—you cannot know, what I mean. You are only a young Doctor. Be humble. Don't presume to advise, sir, on matters connected with Rank and Society.'

'I know what science means,' said Hugh; 'and that's enough for me. Title! Who would not rather make a name for himself than bear a Title?'

'Let us look at the thing practically, children,' said the Doctor. 'I shall never make a name for myself, unless I make a name as a great Donkey. As for the Title, then. If Rank allows me to enlarge my practice and makes a better class of patients send for me, and enables me to ride in a carriage instead of trudging along the streets, and to double all the bills, and to give up making up my own medicines, and to have a balance at the bank, why then I will gladly sport the Title. But if it only makes us ridiculous, let us give it up. A Coronet on the door of a surgery, where medicines are made up by the noble Lord within, does seem ridiculous, doesn't it?'

Uncle Joseph shook his head.

'Rank,' he said, 'can never be ridiculous. But, if you feel it

that way, follow my advice: give up the surgery, take a house at the West End, and go into Society.'

The Doctor shook his head impatiently.

'Let the thing slide,' said Hugh. 'What do you think, Norah?

'I shall always be glad, whatever happens, to think that my father can be a Viscount if he pleases. Of course, at first I thought there must be a great fortune with it. I always thought that Peers were very rich men, and I thought it would be delightful to see him resting a little from his hard work, and not to be afraid any more of the night-bell.'

The Doctor kissed his daughter.

'Children,' he said, 'I have a confession to make. Listen, now. Your father has been a terrible Donkey!'

'If I had been consulted——' said Uncle Joseph.

'No doubt,' the Doctor interrupted him. 'Now hear my tale. Three years ago, I happened to be very much in want of money. The practice had been very bad, as far as paying patients go. I was so troubled for money that I consulted Mr. Murridge as to the best way of getting a loan. I then learned, for the first time in my life, that my second cousinship to an Irish Lord might be turned into money. Mr. Murridge thought it was worth exactly two hundred pounds, and for the two hundred pounds, without which I could not have sent you, Daff, to the University, I sold my reversion.'

'There was some estate, then?' said Hugh curiously. 'I understood there was nothing.'

'There was this small estate of—I do not know how many acres, and I do not know what it is worth, or whether the tenants have paid any rent.'

And Mr. Murridge—Dick's father—bought your reversion?' said Hugh. 'It seems a very strange thing for him to do.'

'His business lies among genealogies and family histories,' said the Doctor. 'He found out what I ought to have learned before signing and selling—that my chances were really very good indeed—almost a certainty.'

'Then,' said Hugh, 'Mr. Murridge thinks he is going to be the landlord, I suppose?'

'Certainly; he has bought me out.'

'Father,' said Norah, 'you did it for the best. It was for us—for Daff—that you took the money. What does it matter? Let us all go on just as before. Hugh won't mind; will you, Hugh?'

'No, I don't mind, Norah. But I venture to make a little

prophecy, Doctor. Mr. Murridge will never be owner of the Clonsilla estates, even if they consist of nothing but a four-acre field of bog. He thinks he has got them, but he may find that he has overreached himself.'

'If I were consulted,' said Uncle Joseph, 'I should invite the tenants to a——'

Again he was interrupted. This time it was the last post of the day, which brought a letter in a great blue envelope, addressed in a great sprawling hand, as if written with a pitchfork: 'For the Honnable Lord Viscount Clonsilla, somewhere in London.'

'It is the first Recognition of Rank,' said her Ladyship. 'Open it and read it quickly. Perhaps it is a missive from the Queen—a missive of congratulation.'

'Or an invitation from the Lord Chancellor,' said Uncle Joseph. 'A summons, no doubt, to a Banquet on the Woolsack.'

The Doctor opened it curiously. It did not look, somehow, like an Invitation. It was more like a Bill. The writing of the letter was even worse, more sprawling, than that of the address.

'MY LORD,' the letter ran, 'this is to warn you that the first man evicted from his holding will be the signal for your Bloody End. No rents. No eviction. Remember Lord Mountmorres. We will have Vengeance. Blood and Revenge. You shall die. Look at the picture. Think of the Whiteboys and the Invincibles. Death! Death! Death! Every man has got his gun, and we are sworn. Death! Death! Blood and Death! Down with Landlords!'

And at the bottom, rudely designed, were a coffin, a gun, a skull, effectively and feelingly delineated, and two cross-bones copied from the churchyard.

The Doctor handed this cheerful epistle to his wife with a laugh; but no one, even in the secure retreat of a fastness of Camden Town, quite likes to have a letter sent to him with a promise of murder if he dares to enforce his rights, and the picture of a coffin and a skull.

'Murridge, I suppose, has sent them all notices to pay up,' he said. 'This is a cheerful situation. He is to get the rents, and I am to get the credit for them—in bullets. I don't think this was in the agreement.'

'At all events,' said Hugh, 'they don't know where to find you. "Somewhere in London" is a little too vague even for an evicted Irish tenant.'

'As their landlord,' said Uncle Joseph, 'you should gain their loyalty—by a Banquet.'

'Well, children,' the Doctor continued, disregarding this suggestion, 'you have now heard the whole story. What are we to do? Shall I alter the plate on the door? Shall I attend my patients, at anything I can get a visit, in my coronet? Shall we invite the landlord-shooters to Camden Town? What do you say, Daff?'

'Well,' said the medical student, 'as there is no money, there will be no fun with the Title.'

'We will go on,' said Norah, 'just as before. Only, of course, with a little more pride. You are pleased, Hugh, are you not, that you are engaged to a real lady by birth, and the daughter of a Viscount, if he chooses to take the Title? It is always best to belong to a good family.'

'Yes,' said the Doctor; 'Creeping Bob was——'

'Hush!' said Norah. 'I will not hear any stories about my great-great-grandfather. There are always scandals in every old family. I prefer to believe that they have all been the soul of honour—every one of them.'

'You are disappointed, my dear.' The Doctor turned to his wife.

'Oh!' she cried, bursting into tears, with the revolutionary letter in her hand, 'if we are to be murdered in our beds, and all for nothing, with no money, and no land, let us say no more about it. But it is a cruel thing to give up your Rank. And just as the tradespeople are beginning to find it out. Why, this morning the butcher congratulated me. He had just heard it, he said. And he put a penny a pound more upon the beef.'

'Well,' said the Doctor, 'that is settled, then. The Title is extinct. My children, you will, however, continue to be as Honourable as you can.'

Before Hugh went to bed that night he read over again a letter which he had received that morning from his mother. This was the conclusion:

'And now, my dear boy, you know the whole. If you are desirous of acting before the doctor allows me to travel, go to my solicitors, Messrs. Ongar and Greensted, of Lincoln's Inn Fields. They have the papers, and know my secret. If it is not necessary, wait until my arrival. I expect to be released in a week or so, if things go well. Do not, however, move in the matter without consulting them, and I do not think it is prudent to tell anyone—even Norah—until you have consulted them. It is vexatious to conceal anything from her. Still, have patience for a week.'

'I don't think,' said Hugh, 'that the doctor will mind much. Murridge, I take it, will be astonished.'

CHAPTER VIII.

IE GRAVE OF HONOUR.

LET this chapter be printed within a deep black border. Let it be in mourning. Let it be illustrated with all the emblems which can be gathered together of disgrace and dishonour. The Valley of Tophet, with its baleful fires, may furnish a frontispiece—there may be funereal cypress, henbane, deadly nightshade, and the poisonous flowers of marsh and ditch may adorn the corners of its pages. There should be a drawing of Adam turned out of Paradise, with portraits of all the most celebrated renegades, turncoats, and traitors, and the most eminent Sneaks, in history. For a man may do many things wicked and base, and yet find forgiveness; he may drag his name in the dust, and trample on his self-respect, and give a rein to his passion, and yet be welcomed back into the world of honourable men. But the thing which Dick Murridge did was one which can never be forgiven him in this world, save by the girl to whom he did this wrong. And she, I think, has forgiven him already.

He did it on the Tuesday morning, two days before his week expired. He spent the whole of Monday in putting his Case upon paper in the form of a Report. On Tuesday he went into town before his father, and on his arrival followed him into the inner office, with a roll of paper in his hand.

'I think, sir,' he said, 'that I have done all I can in this matter. I have put down on paper what I have to tell you—for your private information.'

'Do you mean that you have found the thief and forger?'

'I think I have.'

'Think! I want you to be sure. And what do you mean by talking of my private information? If you've got the man, I'll soon show you how private I will keep the information.'

'If you will read these papers——'

'Afterwards. Tell me who did it.'

'Well, then. It was—none other—than—your private clerk—Norah Cronan.'

Dick looked his father steadily in the face, speaking slowly and deliberately.

'I don't believe it!'

Mr. Murridge sprang to his feet, and banged the table with his fist.

'Read these papers, then.'

'Dick, I don't believe it! The thing is impossible! Where are your proofs?'

'Read these papers.'

'Norah Cronan! It cannot be!'

Dick smiled, as one who is on a rock of certainty, and can afford to smile.

'What have you always told me, sir? Never trust anybody. Every man is for himself. Every man has his price. Everybody thinks of nothing but himself. Very well, then. Remember these maxims before you say that anything is impossible. If you will read these papers, you will find——'

'Read the paper yourself. Let me know all that you can prove. Read the paper yourself. Quick!'

He threw himself into a chair and waited with angry light in his eye.

Everything happens in the way we least expect. Dick had made up his mind that he would lay the paper upon the table with solemnity suitable to the occasion, and then retire, leaving the document to produce its natural effect. He further calculated that, after reading the paper, his father would most likely send for him, and enjoin him to say nothing more about the matter. That, at least, was what he hoped. But he had not expected to be asked to read the paper aloud, and he naturally hesitated. He had committed to writing an Enormous Lie, or, rather, a Chain and Series of Lies—all strong, massive, well-connected, forming together a tale which, for cowardice and meanness, never had an equal since the days when men first learned to tell lies, swop yarns, invent excuses, and pass on the blame. Certainly, it would never have a superior. To write such a thing, however, was one thing—to read it calmly and coldly was another.

When Dick had once made up his mind that escape was only possible by one method, he gave his whole thought, and devoted the greatest possible pains to make the narrative complete in all its parts, and impregnable at every point. He wrote and re-wrote every single sentence half-a-dozen times; he read it over and over again; he examined the document critically; he put himself in the place of a hostile and suspicious critic; he even read it aloud, which is the very best way possible of testing the strength of such a document, whether from the credible and the probable, or from the plausible and persuasive, or from the purely literary point of view.. He was not greatly skilled, as may be supposed, in Fiction

considered as a Fine Art, which is, perhaps, the reason why he was quite satisfied in his own mind with his statement, looked at from any point of view.

'Read it,' his father repeated. 'Let me hear what you have found. If it is true——'

He stopped, because he knew not what he should do if it were true.

The young man hesitated no longer. With perfectly steady eyes, which met his father's fearlessly and frankly, and with brazen front, and with clear, unhesitating voice, he read the Thing he had made up.

'Before I begin this Statement'—the words formed part of the Narrative—'I wish to explain that nothing but your express command that I should investigate the Case for you would have induced me to write down what I know about it. You will consider it as, in part, a Confession.'

Mr. Murridge looked up sharply and suspiciously.

'Yes, as you will presently see,' Dick repeated, answering that glance, 'a Confession. When the duty of taking up and investigating this case was laid upon me, my lips, which would otherwise have remained shut, as a point of honour, were opened. If I did not obey your command to the fullest extent, innocent persons might be suspected and even be punished. I have, therefore, resolved upon telling you all that I know, whatever happens. And since I must write down the Truth, I pray that no further action may be taken in the Case, and that this most deplorable business may be forgotten and dropped, never to be mentioned again.'

'What the Devil do you mean by that?' his father cried. 'The business forgotten! The matter allowed to drop! Do I look like the man to forget such a thing? No further action, indeed! Wait, you shall see what further action I shall take.'

Dick did not stop to press this petition for mercy.

'It is now four weeks,' he continued, reading from the paper, since I had the misfortune—it was a great misfortune to me, and I am very sorry that it happened—to observe, quite accidentally, a certain suspicious circumstance which took place in your own office. This circumstance caused me the greatest uneasiness and suspicion at the time, and has filled me with anxiety ever since. Of course, as you will immediately understand, directly you spoke to me last week my suspicions turned to certainty. I was, as usual, in the outer office, and I had nothing to do but to sit and wait for any work which might be sent out. The time was a quarter-past two.

You were gone out to your dinner, and the boy was gone to his. There was, therefore, no one at all in the place except myself. Before you went out you locked up your safe with your papers in it. I know that, because, as you passed through the outer door, you dropped the keys into your pocket. You left your own door wide open. A few minutes afterwards, to my astonishment, Norah Cronan came in. "Is your father in?" she asked in a whisper. I asked her if she knew what time it was, and whether she expected a regular man like you to be in at a quarter-past two. She made no reply, but went into your office very quickly and shut the door. As she passed me I remarked that her face was red and her eyes looked swollen, as if she had been crying. I dare say you yourself have noticed that, for some time past, she has been out of spirits?'

Mr. Murridge grunted; but what he meant is not known.

'She shut the door, but, as sometimes happens, the lock did not catch, and the door stood ajar. From the place where I was sitting I could see through the door, and could catch something of what she was about. I was not curious, but I looked, and I observed that she was tearing something out of a book. This was such a strange thing to do, that it caught my eye. Why should she come to your office, when you were out, in order to tear leaves out of a book? It certainly seemed to be a book of some kind, but from my place I was quite unable to see what it was, or why she was tearing it up. Then she folded the leaves very carefully, and, so far as I could see, put them in her pocket. After a few minutes she came out again. Of course I was by this time very curious indeed, but I asked no questions. A man does not like to seem curious about a thing which he has seen, so to speak, through a keyhole. I noticed, however, that her breath was quick, and that her hand trembled. And she said a very strange thing to me. "Dick," she said, "when your father comes back, do not tell him that I came here. I only came to get something—something which I forgot this morning, nothing of any importance." She stammered a great deal while she said this. I told her that it was no business of mine whether she came or whether she stayed away, because I had nothing to do with her or her work. Then she laid her hand on my shoulder and looked into my face. "But promise, Dick," she said. "You see we are such old friends, you and I, and Daff is your bosom friend. We ought to be able to depend on you. Promise, dear Dick; say that you will never tell your father that I came to his office any day when he was out of it." I naturally promised. And she went away. As soon as she was gone I went

into your office to find out what she had been tearing, if I could, being still curious, and not best satisfied with myself for having made that promise. There were two or three great books on the table, your genealogical books. But she would not be likely to tear any of the leaves out of them, because they are not the only copies. I looked about, therefore, and presently, poked away under some papers, I found your cheque-book lying on the table. I took it up and examined it. I do not know why, because I had no suspicion of this kind of thing. What was my astonishment to discover that six of the cheques had been taken out of the book! Six; they were scattered here and there, not taken out in a lump. This, of course, was in order to lessen the chance of immediate discovery. I never before knew that you were in the habit of leaving your cheque-book out. This was the thing that I found. It was afterwards, when I began to think about it, that I connected the leaves torn out of the book, and so carefully folded, with the cheque-book.'

Mr. Murridge's face, which had been at first expectant and interested, was now as black as Erebus.

'Go on,' he said. 'Get on faster. Let us finish with this.'

'I returned to my desk, and considered what was best to be done. Of course—I admit this freely—I ought to have gone directly to you and informed you of my discovery. In not doing this I committed a great error of judgment, as well as a breach of duty. For I should have considered that, when the absence of the cheques was discovered, it would be remembered that there were only two persons—not counting the office-boy—who had access to your office. These were Norah and myself. One of us must have taken them.'

'Why, no,' said Mr. Murridge. 'For it cannot be proved that no one came into this office except you two. There is the office-boy; there is the housekeeper; there are any number of people whom the housekeeper may have admitted on the Sunday or in the evening; there is nothing to prove when I left my cheque-book lying about. It might have been lying on the table all night, or from Saturday until Monday. I cannot admit that the thing lies between you and Norah Cronan.'

'Very well, sir; I am glad you think that it may lie outside us. That, however, was how I put it to myself, I confess.'

'You ought to have told me at once. You find my cheque-book with six cheques torn out, and you did not tell me. Were you mad?'

'Perhaps ; but remember that I only saw leaves, or what seemed to be leaves, torn out and folded up. It was not till afterwards, I repeat, that I suspected Norah of stealing cheques. It was not till you told me of your loss that I really connected her with those cheques.'

'You ought to have told me directly you heard of the loss.'

'I confess, again, that I ought to have told you. Well, I did not. That is all I can say. First, I had passed my word to Norah that I would not mention her visit. Next, I was confused and bewildered on her account, and then I was afraid of you.'

'Oh, afraid of me !'

'Yes, afraid of you. Norah has been your favourite always. You give her the confidential work, and me the office drudgery. I thought you would not believe me. Perhaps I hoped that she would get off altogether. But when you placed the whole Case in my hands, the first thing that forced itself upon me was that the forgery must have been committed by means of these very missing cheques.'

'Well, the numbers prove that.'

'So that nothing was left to me but to confess what I knew, and to follow up that fact as a clue.'

Dick sighed heavily.

'I wish the task had been entrusted to another man. First I thought of going to Calista and telling her everything. But Norah is her sister, so that it seemed best to tell you all myself. Perhaps Calista may be spared the pain of ever learning this dreadful thing. As for the actual forger, I cannot yet speak. But I have proofs as to the presentation of two cheques out of the five.'

'Proofs ? Nothing but the clearest proofs will satisfy me !'

'You shall be satisfied, then. What do you think of this for one proof ? The girl described by the Bank Clerk as having presented one of the cheques was Norah herself. For proof send for the clerk when she is here. He will be able to identify her, I dare say. That is my first proof. Now for the second : The young gentleman who presented and cashed the cheque last Thursday, at one o'clock, was no other than her brother, young Hyacinth Cronan —Daffodil. He must have gone to the Bank just before one o'clock, because he came here a few minutes after one, and we went out to dinner together. We went to Crosby Hall, and sat there till two. The clerk, you know, gave one o'clock as the hour. I have no doubt but he will identify Daffodil as well. It will be perfectly easy.'

'The cheques may have been given to them.'

'By the actual forger? Very possible. But in this case unlikely. Because who would do it for them?'

'Go on.' The Case was getting blacker.

'As regards the character of Daff—I mean Hyacinth—for steadiness, I am afraid we cannot say much. He is, as you know, perhaps, at University College Hospital, and he belongs to a fast set. They play billiards, smoke together, have parties in each other's rooms, and go to theatres and music-halls'—all this was strictly true, and yet—poor Daffodil!—'worse still, he goes to a gaming den. It is a place open every evening for playing baccarat, and every kind of gambling game. I dare say, when they do nothing else, they play pitch and toss. I remembered your recommendation to use every means in order to find out the truth, and I went with him. We went twice last week.' This also, as we know, was literally true. 'I have also learned that he is in money difficulties.' Daffodil had shown Dick a letter from his tailor intimating that something on account would be desirable. 'Altogether, I think my theory will prove right—Norah took the cheques with a view to help her brother. Of course she knows very well your custom of drawing twelve-pound cheques for private purposes. Therefore she filled these up for that amount, confident that they would then pass without suspicion, and might even escape your notice. She imitated your signature; and she gave them every one to her brother, except that which she cashed herself, presumably also for him. I am quite sure she did it for her brother. Whether he knows how she got the cheques—whether he stands in with her—I cannot tell. That will be seen when he is confronted with the Bank Clerk, and charged with presenting the cheque. You will judge by what he replies to the charge.'

'Has the girl a lover?'

'She has been engaged for the last week or so only.'

'Who is the man?'

'His name is Hugh Aquila. He is Resident Medical Officer at the Children's Hospital. I was at school with him. But you need not inquire about him. He has got nothing to do with it.'

'How do you know that?'

'Because his mother has money. Madame Aquila was a professional singer, who made money and retired from the profession. Besides, he thinks about nothing but his work. He has as much money as he wants, and he never was in debt or any trouble. Why should he stand in?'

'He is not a man who bets and gambles?'

'Not at all.'

'Humph! Give me the paper. There's a nest of villainy somewhere about the place.'

Dick folded it neatly, and handed it over with the air of the undertaker's man handing the gloves at a funeral.

'Of course you are prepared to swear to this statement?'

'Certainly.' This with perfectly steady eyes. 'Of course, I trust it will not be necessary.'

'Very well. There remains the man who presented the three cheques. I have not yet laid my hands upon him. No doubt, if Norah confesses, she will tell you who he is. If not, you have enough to satisfy you.'

'I have enough, when I have all. Go now—or stay—where are the cheques and the cheque-book that I left in your hands?'

'They are locked up in my private drawer in the other room. I will get them.' He vanished, but returned in a moment. 'They are gone!' he cried. 'The cheques are gone!'

'Gone!'

'They are gone! On Saturday I left them in my private drawer. Now they are gone.'

'Was the drawer locked?'

'It is always locked. Here is the key which has just unlocked it. Indeed, I am sure they were in the drawer on Saturday.'

Mr. Murridge went into the outer office. The private drawer contained nothing but a few unimportant papers. The drawer, indeed, might just as well have been unlocked. For the forged cheques and the cheque-book, which Dick said were left there on Saturday, had disappeared.

'Who has been in this office, boy,' asked Mr. Murridge, 'besides yourself, since Saturday?'

'Only Miss Cronan, sir; and Mr. Richard to-day, sir. Nobody came yesterday, sir.'

'What time did you leave the place on Saturday?'

'Not till three o'clock, sir. Miss Cronan was with you when you brought me out the letters to copy and to post.'

'Norah was working with me on Saturday afternoon,' said Mr. Murridge, 'until four o'clock. I remember. Then she went away. I worked here alone till six. Have you a bunch of keys at all, you boy?'

'No, sir; I haven't got anything to lock up. Search me, if you like.'

'Have you seen Mr. Richard's drawer standing open? I don't want to search you. What the devil should I search you for?'

'No, sir. The drawer is never open that I know of, except Mr. Richard's in his chair.'

'Have you ever tried to open that drawer yourself, with a key or without?'

'No, sir. He always locks it. And I haven't got no keys. And why should I want to open Mr. Richard's drawer?'

'There's villainy somewhere.' Mr. Murridge breathed hard, and put his hands in his pockets. 'Villainy somewhere. I'll get to the bottom of this.'

'The vanishing of the cheques,' said Dick, 'seems to crown the whole thing.'

'What do you mean?' asked his father roughly.

Dick showed his key.

'You see, it is quite a common key. Anybody with a good big bunch of keys could open the drawer. Perhaps, even—such things do happen—when the key was turned the bolt fell back, and the drawer was open. What did you give me the cheques for? They were no use to me—not the least use.'

Mr. Murridge grunted. The cheques could not, under any circumstances, have been of use to his son in his investigation. Now they were gone, perhaps lost altogether. Why, it was now become a forgery without what the French call the pieces of conviction. Who can prove a forgery when there is no document before the Court? Mr. Murridge retired to his own office, followed by his son.

'Look here, Dick,' he said, 'this thing is getting more complicated. I must think it over. You've done your share. Leave it to me.'

'You needn't go investigating, or inquiring, or anything,' said his son: 'you may entirely depend on the truth of my facts. Start from them.'

'Perhaps. Yes; well. I've nothing for you at the office, Dick. Go and take a holiday; amuse yourself somehow—as you like to amuse yourself. But, mind, not a word to anybody—not a syllable. Not a breath of what you've told me either to Norah or to her brother. This paper and the accusation it contains belong to me. Do you hold your tongue about the matter. Let no one suspect.'

Dick desired nothing so much as complete oblivion and the burial of the whole business. He said so, in fact.

'But what shall you do next?' he asked.

'That is my business. Only hold your tongue, and leave the rest of the Case to me.'

'It has come,' said the office-boy, watching. 'He's done something at last. He's ordered to leave the office in disgrace. I knew he would do something; and I've got something more, and I shall make him wriggle. He thinks he won't be found out. Ho! I'm a measly little devil, and she's a Sapphier. It's something against her, is it? Just you wait. The office-boy has a 'eye open.'

Mr. Murridge went back to his own office and sat down gloomy and wrathful. He left his door wide open, and the boy, sitting at his own table, his hands on the handle of the letterpress, watched him carefully, wondering whether the time was yet arrived for him to step in. But for such a lad to 'step in' before the right moment might endanger everything. Suppose if by reason of premature stepping in, instead of seeing Mr. Richard wriggle, he might himself have to do all the wriggling? If he got turned out of his berth this would certainly happen to him when he went home, his father being a Fellowship Porter, and stout of arm.

All this took place at ten o'clock, the first thing in the morning. It was over by half-past ten. When, at eleven o'clock, Norah came as usual, she found her employer sitting idle. His letters were unopened, his safe was still shut, his papers were not laid out before him. The day's work was not yet commenced.

'Why!' cried Norah; 'what is the matter with you to-day? Are you ill?'

Her eyes were so bright, her face so full of sunshine, her look so radiant with the happiness of youth, innocence, and love, that Mr. Murridge groaned aloud, wondering how this thing could be possible.

'Wait a moment here,' he said, taking his hat; 'I will be back in a few minutes.'

Norah had plenty to occupy her. She opened her black bag, spread out her papers, and put them in order, till Mr. Murridge returned, which was after five minutes; he was accompanied by a young gentleman, who, while Mr. Murridge opened his safe, and rummaged among his papers, stared at Norah rather more closely than was consistent with good manners, according to her own views.

'Here,' said Mr. Murridge presently, taking his head out of the safe, 'is what you want.' He gave the young gentleman a paper, and followed him out of the office. 'Well?' he asked in a whisper.

'That is the young lady,' the clerk replied, also in a whisper.

But the office-boy heard and wondered.

'You are quite sure of it?'

'Quite sure. I would swear to her. I am certain of her identity.'

Then Mr. Murridge came back and shut the door.

'Norah,' he said, walking up and down the room in considerable agitation, 'a very curious thing has happened.'

'What is that?'

'I have been robbed.'

'Oh! How dreadful! Is it much?'

'I have been robbed—treacherously robbed,' he added, as if most robberies were open-handed and friendly, 'of sixty pounds, by means of five forged cheques, payable to bearer.'

'Oh!'

'Each was for twelve pounds. Now, listen. Three were brought to the Bank and cashed by one man—a man who spoke a foreign accent, and who can be easily identified. He presented them on the third, the sixth, and thirteenth of this month.'

'Well,' said Norah, 'if he can be identified, you ought to be able to find him.'

'One, also one of the forged cheques, was presented on Friday, the fifteenth, at a quarter-past twelve, by a young lady.' Mr. Murridge watched the effect of his words, and spoke very slowly. 'It was a cheque for twelve pounds, payable to bearer. It was cashed by a young lady. What is the matter, Norah?' for the girl turned white, and reeled as if she was about to faint.

'Nothing. Go on. It is nothing.' But she was white and frightened, and she trembled, and was fain to sit down. Norah was a bad actress.

'By a young lady who can also, if necessary, be identified. And on Thursday last, another for the same sum of twelve pounds was presented at about a quarter to one by a young gentleman whom the clerk declares he would recognise at once. He is described as a handsome boy, with light, curly hair, and an easy manner; he wears a pot-hat, and has a red tie. Well, that is nearly all we know at present. I have nothing more to tell you. Stay, one thing more. The forged cheques, with the cheque-book from which they were stolen, were all in my son's private drawer, which he keeps locked, on Saturday morning. Of that he is certain. They have now disappeared. They, too, have been stolen. My son's drawer has been broken open, and the cheques have been taken from it. Do you quite understand?'

She tried to speak, but she could not. In the young lady she recognised herself. She had, with her own hands, presented that

cheque, and received gold for it; she remembered who had given her the cheque, and to whom she had given the money; more than this, in the handsome boy with the red tie she recognised her own brother Daff; not because he, too, wore a red tie, but because he had told her, talking trifles over an evening pipe, how he had cashed one of Mr. Murridge's cheques that morning, and for whom he had cashed it.

'Are you quite sure—are you positive that these two cheques, cashed by the young lady and by the boy, were forgeries? Oh, Mr. Murridge, think. It is a dreadful charge to bring against anybody. Were they really forgeries? You may have forgotten, you know. They may have been your own. How do you know for certain that they were forgeries?'

What did she mean? What on earth did she mean by talking in this way?

'They were not my own. They were forged,' he repeated sternly. 'I know that from the dates, and from the number of the cheques.'

'Norah,' he said presently, 'you have been a good girl to me; a very clever and good girl you've been to me for five years. I acknowledge it—I feel it. I wish I had raised your salary before. You deserve more: you've been a very good girl. You have carried through many difficult Cases for me. I don't know what I should have done in lots of Cases without your help. This robbery distresses me. I did not think I could have been so much distressed by anything. I say it is a most distressing thing to me.' He repeated his words, and seemed at a loss how to express himself. 'Now I will give you one more sign of my confidence in you—a complete proof of my confidence in you. I will put this Case, too, into your hands. Do you hear? You shall carry it through for me.'

She made no sign whatever.

'I will give it to you for your own investigation. You shall find out, Norah, who took the cheques from my cheque-book, who filled them and signed them, who presented them. You shall help me to bring this villain to justice.' The girl sat before him with pale cheek, and eyes down-dropped, and she trembled. Her hands trembled, her lips trembled, her shoulders trembled. 'It shall be your task. Will you undertake it?'

Still she made no sign.

'It may be—I say it may be—that some excuses, what men call excuses—idle things, but they are sometimes accepted—may be

found. The thing may have been done by someone to help another person in trouble. Oh, there are people so foolish and weak that they will even incur the risk of crime, and disgrace, and punishment for others. Women have been known to do such things for their prodigal lovers and their unworthy brothers. Find out, if you can, such an excuse; and when you bring me the name of the guilty person I will consider how far that excuse may avail in saving him from punishment.'

'Spare me!' cried Norah. 'Oh, I will do anything else that you ask me—anything else; but I cannot do this.'

'Why not?'

'Because I cannot. I can give you no reason.'

'You refuse to do it. Why? I don't ask you this time, Norah. I command you. If you are still to remain in my service, undertake this investigation.'

'I will not. I cannot. I will rather leave your service.'

'Then, before we part, read this paper. It was placed in my hands this morning by my son. He is your old friend and companion. Your brother is also his old friend and companion. Your family have all been kind to him. Yet he has been compelled to write this report for me. Read it. Think of the pain it must have given him to write it; and the pain, yes, the deep pain, it gives me to read it.'

Norah read it. When she came to the place where the writer spoke of herself she read slowly, not able at first to understand it. Then she cried aloud in amazement from the pain of the blow, which was like the stabbing of a sharp stiletto. But she recovered, and went on to the end. When she had quite finished it, she sunk into her chair and buried her face in her hands, sobbing and crying without restraint. The man who had told her he loved her, and had implored her to marry him one day, had done this thing the next. The boy in the outer office heard her crying, and wondered whether now the time had arrived for his own appearance.

Not yet, he thought; not yet. Above all things an opportune appearance and a dramatic effect!

'What have you to say?' asked Mr. Murridge.

'Oh, Dick, Dick!'

It was all she had to say. Presently she lifted her head and dashed away her tears, and proudly gave back the paper to Mr. Murridge.

'Well?'

'I have nothing to say,' she replied. 'What is there to say?'

'Here is a distinct charge against you. A most serious charge. The most serious charge that could be made against you.'

'I have nothing to say. Stay! Yes. The Bank Clerk, he says, can identify two persons who presented cheques. He need not be called upon to do so. They were myself and my brother Hyacinth. I have nothing more to say. I will answer no questions. You must do as you please.'

'I have done all I could for you. I offered you your chance for confession and for excuses——'

'Confession! He says, confession!'

'And you meet me with the daring avowal that you and your brother presented those two forged cheques. Is it possible? You!'

'The two cheques. I did not say the two forged cheques. It is quite true. I drew twelve pounds with one cheque, and Daffodil drew twelve pounds with another.'

The girl repeated this avowal, looking Mr. Murridge straight in the face, without the least shrinking or shame.

'Forged or not, it is the same thing. Since you have owned so much, confess the rest. Why did you take those cheques?'

'Why did I take those cheques? Oh, I have been with this man for five years, and now—now he asks me why I stole his cheques!'

'Tell me, Norah. Yes, you have been with me five years. You have been so honest and faithful that I cannot understand it. Tell me why. I cannot understand it.'

'I will answer no questions. Take up the Case for yourself, Mr. Murridge. You will find me at my mother's, or with Calista, when you want me. You must take it up. You cannot let it stay where it is. You shall not. When you have come to the truth, you will understand why I refused to speak.'

'Tell me the truth now, then, Norah.'

Mr. Murridge, who trusted no one, and thought love and friendship fond and foolish things, was strangely moved by this business. He had thought that when he could lay his hands upon the person who had robbed him, he would straightway hale that person before the magistrate without pity, and, indeed, with revengeful joy. But that person stood before him, convicted by his son's evidence and out of her own mouth, and he was moved to pity.

'Tell me the truth, Norah,' he repeated. 'For God's sake, tell me the truth, and nothing more shall be said about it! No one shall know; it shall be between us two. We will all go on as before. Only, my girl, tell me the truth.'

'I cannot—I cannot. You must find it yourself. I presented one of those cheques, and my brother presented another. That is all I can tell you.'

She was no longer pale. She did not tremble any more. In her cheek there was a burning spot, which might have been the outward and visible sign of conscious guilt. As such Mr. Murridge read it. On the other hand, it might betoken a wrath too deep for words. But as such he did not read it. Whatever it was, her eyes were aflame as she turned her face once more to Mr. Murridge, as she stood with the door open.

'I advise you for once to follow your own maxims. You have always advised me to trust no one. Yet you have sometimes trusted me. In this case trust no one but yourself. When you are satisfied, you will ask me to come back to you. Till then you will see me here no longer.'

The office-boy listened.

'Oh, miss,' he said as she closed the door, 'are you going? He's gone too. He's done something. Oh, I know very well! Are you really going?'

'Really going, for a time, Joe; perhaps altogether.'

'Is there a row, miss? Is he'—he jerked in the direction of Mr. Richard's chair—'is he in it?'

'You had better ask him. Joe, good-bye.'

'She's been crying. The tears were on her cheeks. I wonder,' said the boy, 'whether I ought to go in now? Oh, if I could go in with a cutlass and a brace of pistols!'

But he was afraid.

'It is impossible,' said Mr. Murridge. 'She must have done it. Why did she turn so pale? Why did she tremble? Why were her cheeks so red? She must have done it! Why did she refuse to take up the Case? She must! Very well, then. There is something behind it—something that Dick can't find out. Very well, then; they've got me to deal with now. I will find out the truth for myself.'

CHAPTER IX.

THE BROKEN RING.

'CALISTA,' said Norah, half an hour later, walking into the Infants' Ward, 'I have come to stay with you a little.'

'To stay with me? My dear Norah! What has happened?'

'Nothing. I have left Mr. Murridge, that is all. I am come to stay with you.'

'Tell me, Norah. What is it?'

'Nothing.'

In proof of this assertion she burst into tears and fell upon her sister's neck.

'Tell me, Norah.'

'I cannot—yet. Write to mother and tell her that I am here—say, if you please, for a holiday. Yes, tell her I am here for a holiday.'

'Go into my room, dear. I will be with you directly, and then you shall tell me as much as you please.'

The Sister's room is at the end of the Ward, so that even when she is asleep she is never really away from her charge. It is at once her bedroom and sitting-room, furnished with a table and easy-chair, as well as a bed. In Calista's case—but this, I believe, is matter of individual taste—there were books—in case she might find time to read a little—and pictures, and work. Here Norah sat down and took off hat and jacket, wondering how long people live who are accused of dreadful and shameful things.

'Don't ask me why I am here,' she said, when Calista, after seeing that every Baby was comfortable, and having examined the thermometer and looked to the ventilation, came to her; 'don't ask me, Calista, because I cannot tell you. I can tell no one.'

'You have left Mr. Murridge, dear?'

'Yes. I have left him. I can never, never go back to him again. And, oh, Calista! I must see Hugh as soon as possible—directly.'

'He is somewhere in the Hospital. I will send for him. He can see you in the corridor or somewhere. You are going to tell him what has happened?'

'I am going to tell him, Calista,' said Norah frigidly, 'that it is all over between us. I am going to give him back his ring.'

'Oh, Norah!'

'Please don't ask me why. I cannot tell you. It is not my fault, Calista,' she said, while the tears came again; 'it is not my fault!'

Calista remembered Dick's strange words on Sunday: 'Whatever happens it will be her fault.'

'Tell me,' she said, 'what has Dick done?'

'I cannot tell you.'

Then it was something done by Dick. How had he contrived to make mischief between Mr. Murridge and Norah? Calista resolved upon taking the earliest opportunity of seeing Master Dick.

Unfortunately the events of the next day made that interview impossible for some time to come.

The Corridor in the Children's Hospital, Shadwell, is a quiet place for a Lovers' Tryst, though not like a bosky grove, entirely secluded from observation. And there are no flowers or hedges in it, and the spicy breezes blow not over cottage-gardens, but over the London Docks, which is, perhaps, the reason why they are sometimes very highly spiced. One is, however, safe from being overheard. Therefore, when Norah went out to meet her lover there, she began, quite comfortably, to cry.

'Oh, Hugh!' she said, 'I wonder if you will be sorry?'

'What for, dear?'

'I wonder whether you will console yourself very soon? There are lots of prettier and better girls in the world. Oh, you will soon be happy again without me!'

'My dearest child, what do you mean?'

'I mean, Hugh, that it is all over. Take back your ring. Our engagement is broken off.'

Hugh put his hands behind him.

'You must take it, Hugh. I am serious.'

'I shall not take it, Norah. I am serious too. It takes two to make an engagement, and two to break it off. I refuse, my darling.'

'Hugh, it must be!'

'Tell me why it must be.'

'Because—because—— I cannot tell you! Oh, Hugh, believe me! I can never marry you now, and I can never marry anyone!'

'Why—why—why?'

'Hugh,' she turned upon him a pair of the most sorrowful eyes ever seen, 'would you like to marry a girl disgraced for ever?'

'Disgraced, Norah!'

'Disgraced! Go away, Hugh; I can tell you no more!'

'This is truly wonderful,' said her lover. 'Who dares to speak of disgrace and my Norah in the same breath? My dear, when we two plighted our troth and kissed each other first, it was like the Church service, you know—for better for worse. Perhaps a little of the worse has come at the very beginning. Let me share it with you.'

He took her tearful face in his hands—one on each side—and kissed her forehead and her lips.

'There is trouble in those dear eyes,' he said, 'but no disgrace. Norah, I flatly refuse to break it off. What will you do then?'

'Nothing,' she replied. 'I can do nothing. But I am in serious —terribly serious earnest, Hugh.'

'Then tell me—tell me all.'

She hesitated. The girl who hesitates is not always lost.

'I have been charged with a terrible accusation, Hugh—a dreadful accusation, and I have nothing to meet it with but my own denial.'

'That is enough for those who love you, Norah.'

'It is a charge for which people are every day sent to prison.' She shuddered and trembled. 'Do you understand that, Hugh? You are engaged to a girl who may even be sent to prison, because I cannot prove that I am innocent. What can innocent people do when other people tell lies about them? I am disgraced, Hugh.'

'No, dear; you cannot be disgraced by a mere accusation. Tell me all—exactly as it happened.'

'No. I cannot tell you—I will not. Let him find out the truth for himself. If it is hard for me to bear the falsehood, it will be harder for him to bear the truth.'

'Tell me the truth, then, Norah.'

'No, I will tell no one—not even you.'

'Norah dear, it is my right to ask it.'

'Then I withdraw the right. We are not engaged any longer, Hugh.'

'Tell me this, then. Is it something connected with Mr. Murridge?'

Norah made no reply.

'Is it anything to do with Dick?'

Still she was silent.

'Dick came here on Sunday, grumpy and miserable. Norah, let me bear your burdens for you.'

'You cannot bear my burdens. I take away the right. Hugh, as long as this thing is hanging over me, until my accuser shall withdraw his charge, I am not engaged to you. Oh, Hugh, I am in dreadful earnest!' She drew his ring from her finger and kissed it—a pretty, fragile little thread of gold, set with pearls and emeralds. 'Take it, Hugh.' He refused with a gesture. 'You must—oh, Hugh, you must! Can I wear your ring when I might have handcuffs on my wrists? Take it.' Again he refused. She twisted it with her fingers and the gold snapped. 'Your ring is broken, Hugh. No—let me go—let me go!'

He tried to hold her; he implored her to let him speak, but she broke from him and fled swiftly down the Corridor to her sister's Ward.

Presently Calista came out, and found the Resident Medical standing beside the open window, confused and bewildered.

'Do not contradict her,' she said. 'Let her have her own way. She tells me that she has broken off her engagement, and she is crying and sobbing in my room. Hugh, it is something that Dick has done. I am certain of it. He was here on Sunday, gloomy and careworn. He told me—he warned me, he said, that whatever happened was Norah's fault, because, you know, she refused him.'

'Did he use those words? He is a cur, Calista! He was a cur at school, and he is a cur still. But what could he do or say? She has been accused—hush, Calista! the very whisper makes one's cheeks hot—she has been accused of something—something, she says, for which people are sent to prison. Think of that—our poor Norah!—our poor child!'

Calista laughed scornfully.

'Oh!' she cried. 'This is foolish; this is absurd! Who can have accused her?'

'I do not know. But I will find out before long.'

'She has left Mr. Murridge, she tells me.'

'Then it must be Mr. Murridge—or—Dick.'

'Hugh! Can it be that Dick has himself——'

She did not finish her question, because Hugh answered it by a responsive light in his eyes.

'I will go presently,' he said. 'This morning there is too much to do, but in the afternoon or to-morrow I will go and see Mr. Murridge myself. Somehow or other, Calista, we will get to the bottom of this.'

'Dick could not,' said Calista. 'Oh, it is impossible! Consider. We have always known Dick. He is almost a brother. He has been our friend and companion all the days of his life. He thought he was in love with Norah. Can a man make love to a girl, and ask her to be his wife one day, and the next day accuse her of abominable and shameful things? It is impossible, Hugh. Don't let us suspect Dick.'

'Why, then, did he give you that warning, Calista? Yet we will not suspect him until I have seen Mr. Murridge, and learned all that can be learned. Meantime, what are we to do with Norah?'

'Leave her to me, Hugh.'

'But she is crying and unhappy. She should be with me.'

'Leave her with me, Hugh, for to-day. When you have seen Mr. Murridge we can consider what is to be done. Perhaps you will be

able to lay this spectre. Then you can see her and console her as much as you please.'

Norah sat on Calista's bed, crying. Presently she left off crying and began to wonder how a man could be so revengeful and so wicked. Because now she understood quite clearly that the thing must have been done by no other than Dick, who, in order to screen himself and divert suspicion, had deliberately, and in cold blood, accused her. And this was her old playfellow, the man who had told her he loved her!.

She sat there until the evening. Then she got up, bathed her tearful face, brushed her hair, and went out into the Ward.

'I am come to work, Calista. My dear, I must work. It will do me good to sit up all night. If I lie down I shall hear voices and see figures. Let me stay here among the Babies and help to nurse.'

The day-nurses went away and the night-nurses came to take their places, and among them Norah stood all the brief summer night till the early morning, when the sun rose over the silent City of Labour, and then she sat down in a chair and fell fast asleep. At five o'clock Calista came out in her dressing-gown, and the nurses carried Norah to the Sister's room and laid her on the bed, just as she was, in her clothes, and sleeping heavily.

CHAPTER X.

THE ADVERTISEMENT.

In the whole of Dick Murridge's future life, whether that be long or short, one day will stand out in his memory as the most unlucky. Every man who has been weak and wicked thinks that the day when he was found out is the most unlucky day in his life. Of course, he should consider that the day when he first left the path of virtue was really that day; but to arrive at that conclusion implies a return to that thorny path with what used to be called heart and soul, which is, I believe, rare. The wicked man not infrequently turns away from his wickedness, so many forces acting upon him in the direction of righteousness; but it is seldom indeed that he regards the dodges, tricks, cheats, and deceptions of the past with aught but complacency. There was nothing, at first, to rouse special apprehensions. His father was gloomy at breakfast; he had lost his clerk as well as his sixty pounds, and the clerk was by far the more serious loss; also he could not understand, in spite of his own maxims, how the girl could possibly have done it, and what

she meant by avowing the worst piece of evidence against her, and then bidding him take up the Case himself. But to his son he said nothing to alarm him. Dick accepted his father's silence as a proof that nothing more was going to be done. Norah would be forgiven, he fondly thought. As if Mr. Murridge was the kind of man to sit down satisfied with so strange a thing as this unexplained! Dick, like many crafty persons, was a great Fool. In fact, the whole history of Crime shows a remarkable development of the imaginative faculty going parallel with great craftiness, which prevents its possessors from seeing things in their right proportions, so that they frequently get caught in their own nets. And as if Norah was the kind of girl to accept forgiveness!

He spent the morning—for the third time—with the Count, who was showing him most surprising things with the cards—things which, he clearly perceived, might, in the hands of one who could do them dexterously, lead to surprising results.

'There was a time,' said the Count, 'when I could do these things, before I lost my finger. Do you think I lived in a place like this, the companion of such men as come here every night? Now I can show you how we do them. Anybody may learn how they are done. But there are few indeed who can do them so as never to be suspected or caught. I have watched you, friend Richard, and I know that you can learn. I will make you, if you please, and little by little, a master of the great Art.'

The great Art, of course, was the practical application of scientific Legerdemain to card-playing and gambling. In its simpler forms it means turning the king, forcing a suit, making the bridge, palming a card, giving your adversary the worst hands and yourself the best. When a young man has learned these things, and can do them with a turn of the wrist and without a movement of the eye, he has indeed advanced far, and may be trusted to earn a very decent and comfortable maintenance. But there are higher flights, and although there are many Greeks about the gaming-tables, there never was one who brought to the profession a keener intellect, a more copious resource, a greater wealth of trickery in its highest and most occult branches, than the Signor Giuseppe Piranesi.

'And when I have learned all this, what am I to do?'

'Long before that time comes, you will be glad of the protection which I can give you. Ask me when the Trouble comes.'

'What do you mean by the Trouble? You are always talking about the Trouble.' Dick threw the cards upon the table. 'I tell you there is no Trouble coming.'

'And I tell you, young gentleman, there is a very great Trouble coming upon you, and that very soon. I have seen it coming day after day, and at last it has come. I believe, Richard, that it has come upon you this very day; I believe you will not go home to your father's this evening.'

Dick tried not to tremble, but he succeeded ill. He tried to laugh, and there came a dismal cackle. He picked up the cards, but his hand shook. Was the man a Prophet?

'I have had a dream, my son,' said the Count softly. 'I dreamed that age and youth, experience and inexperience, might help each other.'

'What has that got to do with me and—and the Trouble?'

'Wait—wait, and listen. My dream was of an old man and a young man. They travelled together, and were Partners, though no one knew it. They worked together. The old man knew where to go, and the young man how to work. He had been taught by the old man. They went wherever the money is—there are only a dozen places in the world worth going to—where, that is, there are rich young fellows who are fools enough to think they can win at the game-table. Do you begin to understand this dream?'

'But what has it got to do with the Trouble?'

'The Trouble may be the means of making this Dream a reality. It is a beautiful dream. There is in it the life of luxury, and of ease, and of love.' Dick heard of the love and luxury without much emotion. The former moved him but little, the latter not at all. 'And a life of getting money in it—money, my young friend.'

Dick's cold eyes lit up.

'It will only be necessary for you to follow my instructions, and to be my pupil. You must obey me, and you shall be my Partner. I will introduce you, and I will play square, like the fools at the table, because the cursed loss of my finger prevents me from playing any other way. But you—you—you shall play with every advantage of Science, skill, and courage.'

'Oh!' Dick, it is fair to say, had no objections on the score of honesty, but he distrusted his own powers. 'Oh, it is impossible!'

'A beautiful dream. Everywhere the most delightful life, and the easiest; everywhere the fools who sit about the tables, and expect to win. Perhaps a time may come when it will be no dream, but a necessity.' The Count sighed, and Dick's eyes kindled. 'A divine life, with everything that can be bought, and always money at your fingers' ends. You might be my pupil. In six months I

would teach you enough. Then we would begin. You should be the young Englishman of fortune on his travels. No one suspects the young Englishman of fortune; he is always a Fool; he is always the prey of the Profession. Would you like to be that young Englishman? He loses when the stakes are low, and he wins when the stakes are high. Would that suit you?'

The spider has many blandishments. To the fly he talks the language of innocence, of flattery, of disinterested friendship, and of love. But to brother-spider he uses a different kind of talk.

'If I could only get away!' he said. 'As for the City, I hate it! If I could only get away!'

'You may—you shall. My dear young friend, I will help you because you can help me. That is the foundation of every friendship. My secrets are yours, and yours are mine for the future. We must trust each other, because we can be of service to each other. Hands upon it.'

Dick gave him his hand.

'So,' said the Count. 'Now, my friend, I have business. I will leave you here. I shall return in two hours. You will stay here;' for the first time he assumed a tone of command. 'You will not leave this house until my return.' He put on his hat and lit a cigarette. 'By the way, have you got me another cheque?'

'No,' said Dick shortly.

'Those first three cheques—they were all right—on the square?'

'Of course they were all right. Why should they not be all right?'

'Good—very good. Your secrets are mine, and mine are yours. Partners such as we shall be have no secrets from each other, have they?'

He laughed pleasantly, and went away.

Dick, left alone, began to imagine that life. His own had been so dull that he had not the least idea what it would be like. But there would be no City work, no office, no drudgery of copying and of making up books. There would be change and excitement in it; there would be money in it, and gambling (on the safe side) in it. Was the Count serious? Yet he had spent a great deal of trouble over him. He was not likely to spend that time and trouble for nothing. The chance of leading such a life depended upon himself.

He seized the pack of cards, and began to practise some of the passes and tricks which the Count had taught him. But he was excited and nervous. The most that he dared to hope that morn-

ing was safety for a time ; what was opened up for him now was more than safety for a time ; it was rescue.

The Count said that the Trouble was coming that very day. Well : he knew that the cheques were burned, with the cheque-book. There can be no forgery unless the documents are produced, and they were gone. Oh, what a fortunate chance was this that placed in his hands the very proofs of his own guilt ! The cheques were burned. If his father discovered the truth, he would do nothing—nothing at all. There would be a Row ; there would certainly be a Row. Well, the greatest Row breaks no bones. And he would, perhaps, be turned into the street. Very well. Then, perhaps, the Count would really do what he had promised—become his friend and Partner. Because, you see, Dick had as yet none of that sense of honour which exists between brothers in iniquity. That had to be created in him.

He could do nothing with the cards. He threw them down, and took up the paper. It was the *Times*, and on the second column his eyes fell upon the following advertisement :

'FIFTEEN POUNDS REWARD.—Whereas on the 3rd, the 5th, and the 11th days of June respectively, there were presented and cashed at the Royal City and Provincial Bank, Finsbury Circus Branch, three cheques, each for twelve pounds, payable to self or bearer, and purporting to be signed by myself. The above-named reward will be paid to any person who shall discover the man who presented them. He is described as an elderly man, well dressed, speaks with a foreign accent, has short white hair and white moustache, without beard, and has lost the forefinger of his right hand.

'(Signed) JOHN MURRIDGE,
'Finsbury Circus, E.C.'

Mr. Murridge, in short, was a practical man. The Case perplexed and worried him. He could see no way out of it. Norah took the cheques ; that was certain. She and her brother presented two of them ; that was certain. Why ? And who presented the other three ?

There cannot be many men in London with the three distinctive characteristics of age, a foreign accent, and the loss of the forefinger on the right hand. The man he wanted must be an accomplice in this robbery, or he must have received payment with these cheques. In the former case, he might be discovered by someone who would see the advertisement ; in the latter, he might himself

come forward. He was quite right; the advertisement produced the man. It did more. There were, I think, fifty-two members of the Club. It was, therefore, remarkable that, in the course of that day and the next, Mr. Murridge received forty-six letters, all from the immediate neighbourhood of St. Pancras, King's Cross, and Camden Town, and all informing him that the writer had it in his power to produce the man advertised for on receipt of the promised reward, which might be sent by return post. Thirty-six of the writers followed up the letter by a personal call; twenty-six were abusive when they found that they had to go away with nothing—not even their tempers, which they lost in the office—and ten went away sorrowful. There would have been fifty-one letters; but, unfortunately, the remaining five did not see the *Times*.

A simple advertisement. Nothing more. Yet it knocked down at one stroke the whole of Dick's careful construction. No more was left of it after the advertisement appeared than remains of an Ice Palace in the summer.

Dick knew that. The moment he read the advertisement he understood what would happen.

At two o'clock the Count returned.

'My friend,' he said gravely, 'you have done wrong.'

'What have I done?'

'You have not trusted me. A dozen times have I asked you if those cheques were right.'

'Well, they are——' he began.

'Have done with lies,' said the Count roughly. 'Understand, once and for all, that there are to be no more lies between us. You are to tell me the truth—always. Do you hear? Else you go your own way. Even this morning I gave you another chance.'

'You ought to have shown me the paper.'

'You might have seen the paper.'

'Have you been to my father's?'

'I have. In any case I should have gone to him. What! Am I to be advertised for? Am I to go into hiding? Besides,' his face broke into a sweet smile, 'there are our worthy friends, the members. Do you think that, for fifteen pounds, these gentlemen would not rush to denounce the man without the forefinger? Therefore I anticipated them. Why not?'

Dick waited to know what happened.

'I took a cab. I drove to Finsbury Circus. I sent my card to your father. He was not alone, but he admitted me immediately.'

'What did he say?'

'Nothing—your father said nothing; from which I augur the worst. For myself, as he might wish to hear from me further, I have given him my name and my address—not at this house.'

'He knows that I gave you those cheques. Did he say nothing?'

'He said nothing. When you go home this evening, he will, without doubt, have a great deal to say. But to me he said nothing at all. There is more, however. I was not alone.'

'Who was there?'

'Your father knows now that you gave two more cheques to be cashed. There was another cheque half filled up. A boy in the office has found it and given it to your father.'

'I knew the little devil had got it. I wish I had him here—just for five minutes. I wish I had him here!'

'He had also picked up and gummed together the fragments of paper written all over by you in imitation of your father's handwriting. A dangerous boy!'

'I wish I had him here.'

'What will you do now?'

'I won't go home again,' said Dick.

'Well?'

'Oh,' cried Dick, 'let that dream of yours come to something, Count. Teach me all you can, and I will obey you, and be your servant, or your Partner, or anything you please. I was a fool not to tell you all a week ago and more.'

'It was foolish, indeed, because I guessed the truth all along. There are many young men who do these things. They are always found out; then there is Trouble. As for them, they are mostly silly boys who are born only to sink and be forgotten. But you are different; you are clever, though too crafty, and cold, yet too easily frightened; you have courage—of a kind—such a kind as I want; therefore I will help you.'

Dick murmured something about gratitude.

'No,' said the Count; 'do not talk of gratitude. First of all, you will stay here for awhile until I am ready. While you are here you must not leave this room. You are a prisoner. I will give out to the landlord that you are an invalid. You will spend your time in practising the things I will teach you. Courage! You have burned your boats; you have broken with the past.'

CHAPTER XI.

STILL ONE CHANCE LEFT.

THE blackest cloud sat on the brow of Mr. Murridge. Business was before him which wanted his clever clerk, and she was gone. Wonderful! unheard-of! She confessed what she had done, and she went away without a word of excuse, without any appeal to mercy; just as if somebody else had done the thing. Never was audacity more complete.

'I could forgive her,' said Mr. Murridge. 'I feel it in me to forgive her.' Perhaps the thought of her cleverness, and the loss of her departure, assisted him to this Christian frame of mind. Yes; I feel that I could forgive her. I could stop the sixty pounds out of her salary, and we could go on just exactly the same as before; only I should lock up the cheque-book; if she'd only tell me why she did it, and say she was sorry. And the little devil goes off with a toss of her head and a glare in her eyes as if somebody else had taken the cheques! It's wonderful! it's wonderful!'

Meantime, how could he replace her?

'I'll make her come back to me,' he said. 'If she won't accept my terms I'll prosecute her, even without the cheques. She must have taken them out of Dick's drawer, too. Women will do anything—anything! But that was clever. What will her father say? I don't care. I'll prosecute the Honourable Norah Cronan, daughter of Viscount Clonsilla, for forgery! That is'—he paused—'if I can without the cheques; and then she'll be glad enough to accept my terms.'

While Mr. Murridge was thus breathing fury and flames, he received a call. A young gentleman, whose appearance was unknown to him, knocked at the door and walked in.

'My name is Aquila,' he said. 'You will understand why I have called when I tell you that I am engaged to Miss Norah Cronan.'

'Oh!' Mr. Murridge replied, with a snort; 'you are, are you? And has that young lady seen you since yesterday morning?'

'Yes; I have seen her.'

'Has she made any kind of statement to you? Do you understand what has happened?'

'I learn from her that some kind of charge has been brought against her.'

'She is accused—not by me, but by another—of theft and forgery. Sixty pounds is the total. I have been robbed in my

own office of sixty pounds by five distinct forgeries. She made no bones of confessing the thing to me. Laughed at it, so to speak. Laughed at it! Told me to find out the truth for myself.'

'Confessing! Norah confessing!'

'Certainly. And if, young gentleman, you can explain how she came to confess without the least shame, I should be glad to hear that explanation. Come.'

'Let me understand. How could she confess? What did she say?'

'She confessed that she cashed one of the cheques herself, and that her brother cashed another. Is not that confession enough for you?'

'Nothing would be enough for me, because I am as firmly convinced of her innocence as of my own. Much more firmly, in fact, because Norah could not do this thing. Consider, Mr. Murridge'—the young man's voice trembled—'this is a very dreadful charge to bring against anyone, and most of all against a girl. Yet you talk of it as if it was not only a possible charge, but already proved.'

'Every day in this City,' said Mr. Murridge, 'there are robberies of this kind. They are all committed by perfectly innocent persons previously unsuspected. When they are found out, the first cry is that it is impossible. Now, young gentleman, I am very sorry for the girl's sake—I don't know another person in the world for whom I would say so much. The thing is impossible, is it not? Yet it has happened——'

'Is that all? Tell me exactly. Is it all that Norah said?'

'She said that she would answer no more questions.'

'Is that all?'

'Not quite. What she said then—I can't understand it—was that I must find out the truth for myself. What do you make of that?'

'Only that you have not got the truth yet. Stay; let us send for her brother. Will you let me put a question to him in your presence?'

'By all means. Send the office-boy in a cab.'

Hugh hastily wrote a note, and despatched the boy in a hansom. From the City to Gower Street a tolerably swift cab takes twenty minutes. They had, therefore, forty minutes at least to wait.

'And now,' said Mr. Murridge, 'your relations with this young lady are so intimate, and you know so much, it would be just as well if you knew all.'

He opened his safe, and took from it a roll of paper.

'This document,' he said, 'was placed in my hands by no other than my own son. Read it, remembering that the girl is his old companion and friend from childhood.'

Hugh read it through, slowly and deliberately. Then he read it a second time.

'You accept this statement,' he asked, 'without question?'

'Surely. It is a perfectly plain statement by my own son, who can have nothing whatever to gain by misrepresenting the facts. You observe that he suppressed as long as he could the most important fact.'

Hugh made no reply. But he read the paper a third time. Then he looked carefully about the room.

'Come, Mr. Murridge,' he said, 'let us examine this document with a little more care. Dick says that Norah shut the door; that the door, as sometimes happens, was not quite close, but stood ajar; that from the place where he sat he could see through this partly open door. Come into the outer office with me.'

He carefully adjusted the door so that it should be ajar at an angle of about eleven and a half degrees, which is, so to speak, a good large jar.

'Now,' he said, 'if it was ajar it certainly could not have been wider than this. Here are two tables and two chairs: I suppose he must have been sitting at one of them while he saw the door ajar.'

'This is my son's chair.'

'Sit here, then,' Hugh went on. 'Tell me what you can see in your own office?'

Nothing whatever could be seen of the inner office from Dick's seat, and nothing from the other seat. This will readily be understood if we remember that the fire-place was on the same side for both rooms, and that Mr. Murridge sat near the fire in his room, and Dick between the fireplace and the window in his, while the office-boy was accommodated with a table and a chair on the other side of the fire.

'Very good,' said Hugh. 'The first point of the story is that your son saw Norah from his own place, through the partly opened door. Now, in order to see her, he would have been obliged to leave the seat and go over to the other side of the room.'

'That makes no difference,' said Mr. Murridge. 'The point is that he saw what was being done. He may have been standing—or prying and peeping—that matters nothing.'

'I do not agree with you,' said Hugh. 'The point is that, not being curious, he saw without taking the trouble to spy.'

'Still, no difference. Why shouldn't he spy? A man doesn't like to confess that he was prying and spying.'

Hugh went on to another point.

'He says that Norah folded the cheques and placed them in her bosom. Very good. Let us see the cheques?'

'They are lost. They have been stolen.'

'That is unfortunate. Did you see them?'

'Of course I did.'

'In what manner. Had they been folded?'

It was a bow drawn at a venture. But Mr. Murridge changed countenance and was disconcerted.

'Strange,' he said; 'I had forgotten. Only one was folded. The others had been rolled or carried flat in a pocket-book. I noticed that they were not folded. But one was folded. I am certain that one of them was folded.'

'This makes, you see, the second mistake in this document.'

'What do these little mistakes matter in so weighty a charge as this? My son says that he saw with his own eyes—it doesn't signify to me whether he was peeping through a keyhole—he actually saw Norah tear those cheques out of the book. You cannot get over that plain fact.'

'Plainly, then, Mr. Murridge, I don't believe it. If that is the only way out of the difficulty, I do not believe it.'

'You think my son lied?'

'I am perfectly sure that if he charges Norah with theft he lies.'

'You are engaged to the young lady. You are bound to say that. But, young gentleman, get over her confession, if you can. I tell you I am ready to believe that my son was mistaken if you can get over the plain facts—that I have been robbed, and that Norah confesses.'

'Let us wait till Daffodil comes.'

He sat down opposite to Mr. Murridge, and they waited. There was nearly half an hour yet to wait. To sit opposite to a man for half an hour, waiting for a question to be asked, a question in which is concerned the honour of the girl you love, is awkward.

While they waited, however, there came another visitor.

Mr. Murridge's door was standing wide open, and the visitor walked in.

He was an elderly gentleman with large white moustache, very neatly dressed, with an upright, soldierly bearing. He took off his hat politely, and as he did so Mr. Murridge started, because he recognised the man for whom he had that morning advertised. At

least, this man was short of one finger—the forefinger of his right hand was gone.

'You are Mr. Murridge?' he asked in a slightly foreign accent.

'I am, sir. And you?'

'I believe I am the man whose description is given in the *Times* of this morning.'

'Pray go on, sir.'

'It is, perhaps, usual to advertise for a gentleman under the promise of a reward as if he was a criminal.'

'If he is wanted for evidence, why not?'

'You may withdraw that advertisement, sir; and you may save your money. I am the man who presented three cheques at your bank, and for twelve pounds, and each signed by yourself.'

'Oh!' said Mr. Murridge. 'Now we shall see.' He turned to Hugh. 'Perhaps, as you feel so strongly in this business, you would like to leave me alone with this—this gentleman?'

'On the contrary, I feel so strongly about it, that I must ask your permission to hear what he has to say.'

'As you please. It is the next step in the Enquiry. You understand that I shall connect these three cheques, as well as the other two, with Norah or her brother.'

'You will try.'

'The question is,' said Mr. Murridge, 'first, where you got those cheques; and next, for what consideration?'

'As regards the first,' replied the stranger, 'you ought to know to whom you gave them.'

'I did not give them to anyone. Those cheques were stolen, and the signature is a forgery.'

'Really? That is awkward. It is very awkward.'

'But tell us,' cried Hugh impatiently, springing to his feet. 'Tell us, man!'

'I am much distressed to hear this,' said the stranger. 'I confess, when I saw this advertisement this morning, that I feared there was something wrong about the cheques. I am most distressed.'

'You have not answered my question yet,' said Mr. Murridge. 'Never mind your distress.'

'I am distressed on your account, sir. However, the person from whom I received the cheques was your own son, Mr. Richard Murridge.'

'What!' Mr. Murridge shouted.

'Your own son—no other, certainly.'

Hugh sat down.

'Why—why—for what consideration did you receive that money?'

'In part payment of a loan. I had lent my young friend, from time to time, sums of money amounting in all'—he produced a pocket-book and looked at an entry—'to forty-nine pounds nineteen shillings. He has paid me by three instalments of twelve pounds each—thirty-six pounds. There remains, therefore, the sum of thirteen pounds nineteen shillings—thirteen guineas we will say. For this I have his acknowledgment—here it is.'

He handed Mr. Murridge a slip of paper—a simple I O U drawn and signed by his son. Mr. Murridge examined it. As he held it in his hand, the room became dark, and the figures before him stood as if in thick cloud, and Hugh's voice was like a voice in a dream. For he suddenly understood that it was his son, and not Norah at all, who had done this thing, and he saw, in the signature of his son, what he had never noticed before—perhaps he had never before seen his son's signature—a fatal resemblance to his own.

'You have not yet, sir,' said Hugh, 'given us your name and address.'

The stranger laid his card upon the table. Hugh took it, read it, and handed it to Mr. Murridge.

'Signor Giuseppe Piranesi, No. 88, Argyle Square. That address will always find you?'

'I am in lodgings there. That address will find me for a few weeks longer.'

'Why did you lend my son money?' Mr. Murridge asked quietly.

'To pay his losses at cards.'

'His losses at—at cards? Dick? Losses at cards?'

'Your son's losses at cards.'

'You will have to prove these things, sir,' said Mr. Murridge. 'You will have to prove them. You shall go before a magistrate.'

'Before the Lord Mayor himself, if you please. Meantime, I will keep this little document.' He replaced the I O U in his pocket-book. 'And, if I might suggest as the next step, you might put one or two questions to your son. As, first, how and where he spends his evenings; next, how he has done lately in the matter of luck; and, thirdly, who has lent him money to go on with.'

Mr. Murridge said nothing.

'As to the first, he will reply that he spends all his evenings at a certain club, where there is social conversation, with a little friendly gambling—such as a baccarat-table and tables for écarté, and so forth, and that he is a gambler acharné—for his age, I have never seen a more determined gambler. As for the second question, he

will tell you that luck has been very much against him for some weeks; and, as to the third, that the Proprietor of the Club lent him money from time to time. When you have put these questions and received these answers, I think that you will not want to go before any magistrates.'

'You are, then,' said Hugh, 'the Proprietor of a Gambling Club?'

'I am its Founder, young gentleman. I shall be happy to welcome you, in case you, too, like Mr. Richard Murridge, are devoted to the green table. You will find the Club a highly respectable body of gentlemen.'

Mr. Murridge sat quite silent.

Just then Daffodil arrived. He knew nothing of any trouble, and walked in with his careless, cheerful bearing.

'Here I am, Mr. Murridge. What do you want me for? Is my father elevated to an Earl or a Duke?'

'Will you ask him the question, or shall I?' said Hugh.

Mr. Murridge shook his head.

'Well, then,' Hugh went on, 'be serious, Daff, if you can. Do you remember cashing a cheque at the Royal City and Provincial Bank the other day?'

'Yes; I cashed a cheque all right. For twelve pounds, it was.'

'How did you get that cheque?'

'Why, Dick gave it to me. Asked me to cash it on my way to Crosby Hall, where I was to meet him. I gave him the money. Why?'

'Never mind why. Do you know this gentleman?'

The Signor offered his hand.

'It is my young friend whom Fortune favours. When shall you come again?'

The young man blushed.

'I know him,' he said. 'I have seen him twice.'

'Only twice?' Hugh asked. 'Consider.'

'Only twice,' replied the Signor. 'The young gentleman has only twice been to the Club.'

'Are you in the habit of gambling, Daff?'

'I've only gambled twice in my life,' he replied, blushing.

'Are you in debt?'

'I owe about five pounds to my tailor. It is more than I can pay, but it is all I owe.'

'You have only played cards for money twice?'

'I have played whist in some of the fellows' rooms for threepenny

points. But I have only gambled twice. The first time I won five shillings, and the second fifty shillings and more.'

'Well, who took you?'

Daff hesitated and turned red again. No one likes to tell tales.

'You must tell us. It is for Norah's sake.'

'Well, then, Dick took me.'

'Dick is my most regular member,' said the Signor, as if it was a credit to him. 'He begins with the first, and he plays as long as he can stay. My most regular member. There is no one more regular than Dick. He should have been a Russian.'

'Very good. There is only one other question I want to ask you. Did Dick, to your knowledge, ever ask anyone else to cash a cheque for him?'

'Once he asked Norah.'

'How do you know?'

'Norah told me. We were talking, and she told me. I said she had no business to run errands for Dick.'

'Now, sir,' said Hugh, 'I hope you understand the reason which prompted Norah to refuse any other answer, or to conduct this Enquiry? She knew beforehand.'

'There is villainy somewhere,' said Mr. Murridge harshly; 'villainy somewhere! How do I know that this is not a conspiracy? As for you, sir,' he turned to the Signor, 'I believe you can be sent to prison for corrupting the young.'

Signor Piranesi laughed courteously.

'I assure you, sir,' he said, 'the members of my Club are quite corrupt, as regards gambling, before they come to me.'

'And as for you,' Mr. Murridge shook his finger at Daffodil, 'as for you, I believe you are in the job somehow. Villains all! villains all!'

'And I, too?' said Hugh.

'You have got the girl to defend.'

'The villainy, Mr. Murridge, is established nearer home. You are ready, I hope, to acquit the person first charged?'

'Certainly not—certainly not. How do I know that this is not a conspiracy against my son? Where is he? Let him be confronted with these two. Let me have more evidence. Let me find the last of the stolen cheques.'

Now, all this time the door had been standing wide-open, and behind it sat the office-boy eagerly drinking in every word. He now, for the first time, understood exactly what had happened.

And he now began to experience the joys of revenge, because he had it in his power to deal his long-meditated blow on the man who had called him a measly little devil.

Accordingly, he stepped from his place and boldly entered the inner office.

'What do you want?' asked his master.

'Please, sir, I've heard it all.'

'What if you have? All the world shall hear it all before long.'

'Please, sir,' the boy's bearing was considerably more humble than that invariably adopted by his favourite heroes, but the matter is more important than the manner; 'please, sir, I've found something which Mr. Richard dropped.'

'What is it?'

The boy produced an envelope in which were two pieces of paper. One of them, pink in colour, he laid on the table.

'It is the last of the cheques!' cried Mr. Murridge.

The signature was only, as yet, in pencil, very carefully written. The rest of the cheque was filled up. Like all the rest, it was drawn for the sum of twelve pounds.

'What is the other paper in your hand?' asked Hugh.

'Mr. Richard was always writing things and tearing them up. One day he spent all the morning in writing over a single sheet of paper. Then he tore it up into little pieces. I picked them up and pieced them together.'

He gave Hugh the result. It was a half-sheet of foolscap. It had been torn into a hundred pieces, and was now put together like a child's puzzle, and gummed upon another paper. Across it was written, over and over again, like one of Coutts's cheques, the name of John Murridge—John Murridge—John Murridge, all exactly alike, and all in exact imitation of Mr. Murridge's usual signature. Hugh placed this before Mr. Murridge.

'Are you satisfied now, sir?' he asked.

'I want my son's explanation. You can all go. I am not satisfied until I have my son's explanation.'

They left him. But in the outer office the boy sat with a broad grin upon his expressive countenance. He was one of Nature's artless children, and the thought of Dick's downfall filled him with a joy which he had not learned to suppress and was not ashamed to show. Presently Mr. Richard would come in unsuspecting. Then his father would call him, and the Row would begin. And then the policeman would be called in and they would all go off

together to the Mansion House, where he, the office-boy, would give evidence.

'And then'—he smiled sweetly—'then I shall see him wriggle.'

The office-boy sat all day long lulled with this pleasant anticipation, and contented though he had no novelette in the drawer. Mr. Richard would come upstairs, unsuspecting that his father would call him.

Unfortunately, Mr. Richard did not come that day at all. The office-boy was disappointed. The Row would take place in the privacy of Camden Town. Again, unfortunately, though Mr. Murridge went home thinking he would get that explanation from his son, he was unable even to ask for it, for his son was out when he arrived, and didn't come home at all. And the office-boy will now, probably, never see Mr. Richard wriggle.

CHAPTER XII.

UNCLE JOSEPH AS AN INSTRUMENT.

'No, sir!' Mr. Murridge repeated obstinately; 'I am not satisfied.'

It was the next morning. Hugh called again to learn the result of the proposed explanation.

'I am not satisfied,' he repeated. 'Where is my son? I don't know. He has not been home all night.'

'Has he run away, then? It looks like it.'

'I do not know. I say, that until he has an opportunity of meeting these charges, I will not condemn him. What do I know? The case against him may be a conspiracy got up by you, the girl, and her brother, and the scoundrel who owns a gambling-den. Am I to believe that a boy who has all his life been quiet and orderly is suddenly to become a thief and a gambler?'

'We do not ask you to believe that. We ask you to believe that his vices were kept a secret from you—that he lost money, borrowed in the hope of winning it back, lost that, and borrowed more, until he became deep in debt—deep, that is, for a man of his position—and that under the temptation and pressure he gave way. That is what we ask you to believe!'

'I shall believe nothing. I will form no theory, and I will not condemn my son until I have seen him, and heard what he has to say. For aught I know you may be keeping him hidden out of my way.'

'Then you will not withdraw this charge against Norah?'

'Certainly not. It was my son's accusation, not mine. It is not for me to withdraw it until I am convinced that it is false.'

'You have evidence in your hand sufficient to convince any reasonable person.'

'Perhaps you think so. The evidence of two persons already accused, and by their own admission implicated—the evidence of a foreigner and a professed gambler, and the evidence of a miserable office-boy.'

'With his documents.'

'What do the documents amount to? Nothing. The imitation of my signature may have been Norah's, for aught I know.'

Hugh left him. He was not to be shaken.

I suppose Mr. Murridge knew perfectly well that there was no escape. The fact was proved, but he was obstinate. Until his son could be confronted with this evidence he would not condemn him. Until that time, therefore, the charge against Norah would not be retracted. Nor would she listen to the voice of Love; nor would she return to Mr. Murridge; nor would his business get itself accomplished; nor would his clients establish their Royal, Noble, and Gentle Descent. So that the impediment of Dick's flight produced consequences of a very wide and unexpected kind. You stick a little pin into a piece of machinery; there is the least possible jar which spreads through all the wheels and pistons, and is felt even to the foundations on which the machinery is built. For a whole fortnight they lived in this suspense, Norah remaining with her sister at the Hospital.

It was reserved for Uncle Joseph to be the humble instrument by which this impediment was to be removed. And it happened in this way.

It was his custom, in these long summer evenings, to revisit, by the help of the omnibus, some of the scenes of his former greatness, and especially a certain well-known tavern in Great Queen Street. Here he knew the manager and some of the head-waiters—in fact, he knew by sight every waiter in London, and had a nodding acquaintance with hundreds of the gentry who every morning, about ten o'clock, assemble on the kerbstone outside the great restaurants, waiting to be taken on for the evening. Under their arms most of them carry the uniform of their profession. They are an inoffensive folk, as may be gathered by anyone who will loiter for a minute and listen to their talk; they give no trouble; they never want anybody's property; if you were to offer them three-acre allotments they would not listen; they have never been known to strike, to

combine, to agitate, or to demonstrate; they never march in procession, and have not, between them all, a single banner or a bit of bunting; they are, in the evening, always beautifully dressed for their work; they are civil of speech, active, and zealous; they have, one and all, a curiously cultivated taste in wine; and they are said to have but one vice. This they share with many landed gentlemen. It is a love for the Turf.

Uncle Joseph, who had formerly been an honoured guest two or three nights in every week, now sat humbly in the manager's room, reading the ménus of the day. Alas! they were not for him—those gorgeous-coloured cards, inscribed with the names and titles (all in French) of the most toothsome and delightful dishes. It was something to know that the Banquets still went on, though he was no longer seated at the table near the presiding officer, as richly decorated as a German official; and, no doubt, it was a consolation to accept the hospitable glass of sherry which was sometimes proffered in the manager's room.

One evening, about ten days after Dick vanished away, Uncle Joseph paid a visit to the tavern. There were several beautiful banquets going on, and he read the ménus with the soft regrets due to the happy past. It was nearly nine when he got up to go—the hour when the active business of the banquet is finished, and after the material, the intellectual Feast was to begin with the speeches. Alas! they would never hear him speak again.

As he passed from the manager's room into the hall a door on the first floor was thrown open, and there came out such a joyous sound, a mingling of many sounds in a fine confusion, such as the cliquetis of glasses, the laughter of men who have drunk plenty of wine, the shuffling of waiters' feet, the noise of plates, and the popping of corks, that Uncle Joseph's knees trembled.

'Ah,' he said, 'it is a blessing indeed to feel that the Craft is not falling off.'

He went away, and presently found an omnibus.

Every night about this time he was seized with a dreadful yearning for champagne. This evening it was a yearning which tortured him. The festive sound of the revelry was too much for the old man, and his heart felt like lead to think that there was no more champagne to be had during the short remainder of his history. When he got out of his omnibus at King's Cross, and began to walk homewards, this yearning held him and shook him so that he trembled as he walked, and people thought that he must be suffering from senile weakness. It was not this; it was the yearning

after champagne which made his brain to reel and his eyes to swim. Uncle Joseph had never married ; the experience might have taught him that the passion of Love in some of its forms, as when its object is absent, closely resembled this craving of his for the divine drink which sparkles in the cup and mounts to a man's brain, filling him with pride, and joy, and charity towards all men. Gin-and-water might stay the craving, but as yet he was a quarter of an hour from his gin-and-water, and though there were many public-houses on the way, Uncle Joseph had no money ; even gin-and-water was almost as unattainable as champagne.

While he stopped, however, letting his fancy revel in imaginary goblets, beakers, cups, and glasses, all full, and brimming over, and foaming, and sparkling, and trembling, he became conscious of a face, the sight of which was so little in harmony with his thoughts, that the cup was, so to speak, dashed from his lips and the beverage of the gods was spilt upon the ground.

The face, or rather the head, was in a second-floor window of a house on the other side of the street ; it was looking up and down the street ; a perfectly familiar face, yet for awhile Uncle Joseph could not remember at all to whom it belonged, so great was the yearning within him for champagne. Presently, however, he regained some command over himself, and understood that the face belonged to none other than to Dick Murridge. It was twilight now, but the old, that is to say, some of the old, have long sight, and the gas below caught the face. Oh, there could be no doubt that it was the face of Dick Murridge the Runaway.

For by this time it was well known in vague terms that there was Trouble about some cheques, and that Dick had run away, and that Norah had quarrelled with Mr. Murridge, and was staying with Calista under the pretext or pretence of a holiday.

This seemed a very remarkable discovery. Uncle Joseph was, by nature, curious, inquisitive into other people's affairs, and of a prying nature. Therefore, he at once resolved to pursue this adventure farther.

The house, he now perceived, was a public-house—something better than the ordinary run of street-taverns—for it had a side entrance, marked 'Hotel.' His wits were now completely restored, and he was able to observe carefully the position of the window at which Dick Murridge was sitting. As soon as he was quite certain on this point, he boldly entered by the side-door, and walked upstairs.

Ten days of hiding in his upper chamber had begun to tell upon

Dick Murridge. So great was the terror instilled into him by his Instructor and Protector of his father's vengeance and wrath, that he was afraid to venture out, even after dark, having a confused notion that every policeman in London would have a warrant for his arrest in his pocket, and that he would be taken up on suspicion. He stayed, therefore, all day long in one room, leading a most doleful and miserable existence, ordered by the Count to practise continually the tricks and cozenage of the cards, which were to advance him to that life of Perfect Delight promised by the Tempter. Never had Professor a more eager or an apter pupil. Never did Chinaman take more kindly to ways of guile than Dick Murridge, insomuch that his past ardour and passion for gambling wholly died away, and the excitement of chance seemed a poor thing indeed compared with the excitement of dexterity. He called it dexterity because the Professor gave it that name, and because, in his hands, the mystery of cheating at cards became a Fine Art of the most manifold and occult contrivance, the most profound combination and calculation, the swiftest movement of hand, and the steadiest guard on eye and face. Yet to practise the Black Art all day long, hidden away from the world in a single room, is monotonous.

Suppose that one were to receive, as a gift, the power of cheating with the certainty of never being found out. There are a thousand ways of cheating besides that of cheating at cards. Would not this power be a constant temptation even to the most virtuous among us? What would it not be to one who, like this unfortunate Dick, had been brought up from childhood to believe that there never was any morality, any honour, any honesty, except what springs from a feeling of self-preservation and protection? Would he not jump at such a chance? Now, this was exactly the chance that was offered to Dick Murridge. It came in his extremity, when he had cut himself off from his own people by a deed which would never be forgotten or forgiven. It came when he was in an agony of despair and terror, and it seemed to open a way of life of the greatest ease, comfort, and profit. He knew not yet that there is no way of life without competition, and therefore jealousy, with its attendant tokens of malice, slander, mischief, calumny, and the biting of back. Also he knew not how quickly the professional gambler is detected, and how even the most unbounded lovers of the cards become shy of playing with him. All this he had still to learn.

But it was dull in that upper chamber, which he left only to go downstairs at meal-time to the Bar Parlour, where he sat at table

with the landlord and his family. They knew him as a young gentleman, presumably under a temporary cloud, in whom the Signor, Proprietor of the Club, was interested. It was horribly dull. He hated reading; he grew tired of drawing; he could not be always practising with the cards; he wanted someone to talk with.

'Good-evening, Mr. Richard,' said Uncle Joseph, entering noiselessly.

Dick's head and shoulders were out of the window; but it does not take long to change the position of a head and shoulders.

'What!' he cried, springing to his feet. 'You here—you?'

'Yes, I am here. Ah, you are very snug and quiet, Dick, here! No one would ever expect to find you here. I was just going along the street, you know—just walking down the street, when I saw your face at the window. What a surprise! what a surprise! How pleased your father will be!'

'Is he? What does he—what does he—what does he want with me?'

Uncle Joseph nodded his head impressively. Some men can convey a solemn and impressive assurance much better by a nod of the head than by any words. Uncle Joseph's nod made this young man understand first that his evil deeds were known to everybody, and next that his father would certainly prosecute him. Therefore he sat down again with terror undisguised.

'What did you do it for?' asked Uncle Joseph, who had not the least idea what had been done. But everybody knew that something must have been done, else why did Dick run away?

'Because I was hard up. What else should I do it for?'

In the extremity of his terror Dick presented a manly sulkiness.

'How did you do it?' asked Uncle Joseph again.

'Well, if you want money, and can get it by signing another man's name to a cheque, I suppose you'd do it that way.'

'Ah! To be sure—to be sure; I never thought of it in that light.' Uncle Joseph was acquiring information rapidly. 'Ah, and when did you do it?'

'Six weeks ago, if you want to know.'

'To be sure. Six weeks it was ago. Yes. You are perfectly right, Dick, to keep out of the way—perfectly right—perfectly right. If I were you I would continue to keep out of the way. It is a very serious thing. And your father is a hard man—very. What did you do with the money?'

'I paid some of my debts.'

'Quite right. Quite right. As an honest man should. So far you acted wisely. And have you any of it left?'

'Some—not much.'

'This is a very quiet and comfortable room, Dick. I don't know that I should like to live in a bedroom always, but for a change now, when one really wishes to be undisturbed. Isn't it rather dull here?'

'I suppose it is.'

'Look here, Dick, I'll come here sometimes.' The old man's dull face lit up suddenly as a brilliant thought occurred to him. 'I'll come here sometimes of an evening, and we'll chat. It's dull for me, too, in the evenings, when I recall the glorious evenings I used to have in the time—dear me!—in the time that is past.'

Dick received the proposition doubtfully.

'This will be very much better than going to your father and telling him where you are, won't it?'

'Can you keep a thing quiet?' asked Dick.

'Can I? Haven't I kept the sublime secrets of Thirty-Three Degrees? Secrets of all the Degrees? You forget, young man, that you are speaking to one whose life has been spent in doing nothing else except to keep the secret and work the Degree, and enjoy the Banquet afterwards. Give me a secret and I am happy. With the Banquet afterwards.'

Dick reflected. There had been, earlier in the day, a conversation with his Professor, in which the latter promised to take him out of the country in a week at furthest, as soon, in fact, as he had concluded the sale of his Proprietary Club with all its rights, advantages, privileges, goodwill, and clientèle. The purchaser, we may explain, in parenthesis, was a gentleman connected with the Turf, and in some ways entirely fitted for the post of Proprietor. That is to say, he was perfectly unscrupulous, without morals, honesty, prejudice, or pity. And yet for want of the good manners which served the Count in lieu of these things, he speedily ruined the Club, and dispersed the gamblers, who now gamble elsewhere. A week at furthest. He could not shove the old gentleman down the stairs as he wished to do. It was necessary either to change his lodging or to conciliate him.

He conciliated him. He assured Uncle Joseph that it would give him the greatest satisfaction to confide in his honour, and to receive him in this apartment.

'Then,' said the old man, with an involuntary smacking of his lips, 'as you've got, no doubt, some of the money left, my dear

young friend, and it is very pleasant to sit and talk, let us have—ah!—let us have—oh!' he drew a long, deep sigh, 'a bottle of champagne.'

I suppose his long professional career had accustomed him to associate champagne with secrecy, just as other people's experience leads them to associate champagne with Love, or with racecourses, or with dancing.

They had a glorious bottle of champagne. Uncle Joseph drank it nearly all, and on parting shook Dick effusively by the hand, promised to come again next day, and swore that his secret was as sacred as that of the Thirty-Third Degree.

He kept his word, and returned faithfully the next evening, when he had another bottle of champagne. How valuable a thing is a secret properly handled! Uncle Joseph rubbed his hands over his own cleverness. Why, it was almost like a return to the good old times, except that the bottle of champagne was not preceded by a Banquet. This caused unsteadiness of gait on the way home, and a disposition to laugh and sit on doorsteps, to become playful, and to find one's speech strangely thick. Dick's secret, however, was safe.

'Oh, my dear young friend,' said Uncle Joseph, 'what a happiness for you that it was I who discovered you; suppose it had been your father or Norah? What would have happened? I was in a Police Court this morning'—he certainly was a delightful companion—'I was in a Police Court, and there was a poor young man brought up for embezzlement. He had run away, and they found him, and he was committed for trial. I thought of you, Dick, and my heart bled. I'll come again to-morrow.'

He did return next day, but meantime Dick had heard something which made him less careful to conciliate the man who had his secret. In fact, the word had come to be in readiness.

The Count had settled everything, and they were to go away the very next day. Therefore, when Uncle Joseph rubbed his hands, and said that it was thirsty weather, sent by Providence in order to bring out the full flavour of a dry, sparkling wine, Dick coolly said that he wasn't going to stand any more, but if Uncle Joseph chose to drink soda-and-whisky, instead, he could.

The old man was wounded in his tenderest and most sacred depths. But he dissembled, and drank the substitute, which, as compared with the Great Original, is little better than mere Zoedone. He drank it, and went away early, with treachery in his heart, but a smile upon his lips.

'Come to-morrow night, Uncle Joseph,' said Dick, 'and you shall have as much champagne as you can drink. You shall bathe in champagne if you like.'

There was a Something, this injured old man felt, which meant mischief. He would not get the promised champagne. Dick wouldn't look like that if he meant fair and honest. Yet how mean! How paltry! To grudge a single bottle of champagne, just one a day, for the safe-guarding of so valuable a secret!

In the morning, Uncle Joseph made quite a long journey. He took the train from King's Cross to Bishopsgate, whence he walked to the Whitechapel Road. Here he took the tram which goes along the Commercial Road. He got out half-way down, and made his way through certain by-streets to Glamis Road, Shadwell, where stands the Children's Hospital.

By this time he had learned everything, partly by pretending to know already, and partly by cunning questions, and partly because Dick, with a brutal cynicism, made no secret of his own infamy. Among other things, therefore, he knew that Norah's pretended holiday was a blind to conceal from the Doctor for awhile the fact that she had left her post as Private Secretary to Mr. Murridge, under an accusation of complicity, at least, in a crime.

He went first to Hugh, who presently called Calista.

'I thought,' he said, in conclusion, 'that the young man's friends ought to know. He may be snatched from worse evils, even if he is punished for what he has done. His father is a hard man, but he is, I dare say, just. And Dick is, I fear, in very bad company—very bad company indeed. There were cards on the table, and I fear there has been drinking.'

He lingered, as if there was something more he would like to say. Presently he desired a word in private with Hugh.

He went away with a sovereign in his pocket. He had sold his secret for a sovereign. It was unworthy the Possessor of so many Degrees.

He spent the evening at a restaurant in the Strand over a large bottle of champagne, taken with, and after a colourable imitation of, a Banquet. There were, however, no speeches, because it might have appeared strange for an elderly gentleman to rise at his little table and propose his own health, and respond for the Craft. But the wine was Perrier Jouet, and he drank it slowly and blissfully.

If in these days of forced abstinence, the Tempter were to ap-

proach Uncle Joseph, holding a bottle of champagne in his hand in exchange for the Sublime Secrets of the Thirty-Third Degree, would his virtue sustain him in that hour?

CHAPTER XIII.

A LAST APPEAL.

THE Count's preparations were complete. He had sold his club; he was going to take his pupil with him to some quiet place in Paris, where serious instruction in the Art of seeming to play fairly could be carried on without interruption. They were going to cross by the night-boat, in deference to a newly-developed modesty in Dick. In the afternoon the Count came with a portmanteau containing all that was wanted in the way of temporary outfit.

'We will start,' he said, 'as we shall continue, as gentlemen. If we take furnished lodgings, you must not creep in with no luggage of your own.'

He then proceeded to exhort and admonish his pupil to obedience, diligence and zeal, all of which, he assured him for the hundredth time, would be rewarded by such success as his pupil little dreamt of, and by such dexterity as should make him the Pride of the Profession.

'Above all,' he said, 'patience, coolness, and continual practice. You must never for a single day lose the steady eye and the quick hand. I have confidence in you, my friend. And you have everything to learn—everything. You can play a little, and draw a little. You must learn to play well, and draw well. They are accomplishments which will be useful to you. You must even learn to dance, because a man of your age ought to love dancing. You must always seem ready to desert the table for the ballroom. You must learn to fence, and you must learn to use a pistol. You are going into a country where men fight. You will cease to be an Englishman. Henceforth you will have no country. The whole world is yours, because you will command everything which the world produces. Are you ready?'

'I am both ready and willing.'

'Good. You must learn to carry yourself less like a London clerk, and more like a gentleman. You must assume the air of distinction if you can. You must learn to laugh, and to smile. But all that will come in another country, and with a new language. Come,' he looked at his watch; 'only two hours more and we

shall be in the train—the past gone and forgotten, everything before you new and delightful, not one of the old friends left——'

Here the door opened, and Dick sprang to his feet with a cry, and a sudden change in his eyes to the wildest terror.

'Dick!'

'Calista! You here! What do you want?'

She saw a table littered with cards. On the bed was a portmanteau, closed and strapped, beside it a hat-box and a strapped bundle. With Dick, and standing over him, was a man whom she had never seen; but, from Hugh's description, he looked like the foreign person who had called on Mr. Murridge.

'I want to talk with you, Dick—alone.'

'You can talk, mademoiselle,' said the stranger, 'in my presence. I believe I may say that our friend here has no secrets from me—now.'

'None,' said Dick, emboldened by the reflection that he was under protection, and that Calista was alone. 'No secrets at all. Say what you have to say, Calista, and get it over. You are come to pitch into me. Very well, then.'

'Oh, Dick, I do not come to reproach you. But—oh, Dick, Dick—how could you do it?'

'Never mind that now. What else do you want to say?'

'Have you confessed to your father, Dick?'

'No, I haven't; what's the good? Confess! Why, do you take me for a fool? Confess to him!'

'Dick, my old friend, there is another person to think of besides yourself. There is Norah.'

'What about Norah? My father knows all by this time. But he hasn't got the cheques. Without the cheques there is no proof.'

'If there are no proofs, come with me to your father and tell him that Norah is innocent.'

'What's the use? He knows it already.'

Calista pointed to the portmanteau.

'You are going away?' she said.

'I am going away altogether. You'll get rid of me, and never see me again. So now you will all be happy.'

'Where are you going?'

'That is my business. You would like to go and tell my father, wouldn't you?'

'And how are you going to live?'

'Like the sparrows.'

'Oh, Dick, you have in your head some wild and wicked scheme. What does it mean? You are deceived and betrayed by—by your advisers—by this man. Consider, Dick; no one knows except your father, and Norah, and Hugh. I will beg your father to forgive you. Nothing need ever be said about it. All shall be forgotten, and we will go on as if this dreadful time had never happened—just as we did in the old days, when we were boys and girls together, and innocent—oh, Dick!—and innocent!'

'Listen to this young lady, Dick,' said the Count softly, 'and consider. There is still plenty of time to change your mind. Consider what she says. You will have a delightful time. Your father is never in an ill-temper, is he? He looks and talks as if he was the most indulgent of parents, and of the sweetest disposition. Of course, he will never remind you of this little indiscretion—never. And he will trust you always—always. And he will advance you in his business, and make you partner. And you will always live in this delightful suburb, where there is nothing. Heaven! nothing! Neither theatre, nor café, nor society, nor amusement of any kind. As for your secret, it is known to no one except three other people. Of course, they have told nobody; of course, they never will; so that there is no chance of the story being told abroad, and people will not point fingers at you, and say: "There is the man who forged his father's name, but repented, and came back again, and was forgiven!" What a beautiful thing it will be all your life, to feel that you have been so bad, and that everybody else is so good!'

'Oh no—no!' said Calista. 'It will not be so, Dick; it will not!'

'I have considered,' Dick cried; 'I have made up my mind.'

'And there is the office-boy, too, who found the last of the cheques, and put together those bits of paper. He will hold his tongue, too, of course. Consider well, Dick. You will live despised and suspected. Bah! To be a young man forgiven! The forgiveness will be a ticket-of-leave; the return to work will be under surveillance of the Police. You can never get promotion; you can never live down the past. Young lady, is not this true?'

Calista hesitated; then she took courage.

'Better this, better obscurity and contempt, than a life of wickedness. What is he to do? What do you yourself do? You play cards. Do you play honestly? Better the most humble life.'

'Matter of opinion, mademoiselle. If he goes with me, I offer

him—what? He knows very well that at least he will enjoy an easy life and profitable work, with plenty of money in it, and society, and——'

'Oh, Dick, it cannot be possible! How should this man give you all these things?'

'Dick is a free man,' said the Italian; 'he is perfectly free. He can go with you, or he can come with me, just as he pleases. I understood that he had resolved to accept my offer, and to come with me. His portmanteau is ready and packed, as you see. But if he prefers——'

'I do not prefer; I will go with you. Go away, Calista! Repentance! Forgiveness!'

'Then, Dick, if you must go, before you do go, I ask you for one simple act of justice. Write me a letter clearing Norah altogether.'

'I won't, then! After Norah's conduct to me——'

'Sir,' said Calista, turning to the stranger, 'you say that you are going to introduce Dick to the society of gentlemen. I do not quite understand how he is to take his place among gentlemen, or what gentlemen will receive him; but that is your concern. Will you kindly tell these gentlemen that this man made love to a girl whom he had known all his life, and, when she refused him, charged her solemnly, and in writing, with the crime which he had himself committed? I suppose you care nothing about his having stolen the thing himself?'—Calista, in the satiric vein, surprised herself—'but perhaps——'

'I have forgiven him, young lady,' the Count interrupted with a smile. 'I have anticipated your own kindness, and his father's, and I have already forgiven him.'

'But, at least,' she went on, regardless, 'you may have manliness enough left to blame him for accusing this innocent girl. She is my sister, and once his friend. Will you join him in making all that girl's future life miserable? It is not enough that you know, and I know, and her lover knows, the truth. This wretched boy has left behind him a paper to which his father clings as a kind of last chance that his son is not guilty, after all.'

Dick laughed aloud, and Calista shuddered.

'I think,' said the Count gravely, 'that, if I were our young friend here, I should sit down and write a letter withdrawing the document in question.'

'What's the good?' said Dick. 'Of course, he knows the truth by this time.'

'I should write a short letter, simply stating that this young lady—who must be charming indeed to have diverted our friend's attention from his cards—is perfectly innocent. Our friend, thus forgiven by you, mademoiselle, and by me—presumably also by his father—and, we will hope, by the young lady concerned with himself in the matter, will embark upon his new career with a clear conscience such as you English love to possess, and a light heart, and an utter freedom from anxiety as to inquiry by detectives or unpleasant messages.'

'No one will inquire, I am sure; no one will send any detectives after him. I think I can promise that. As for the money, Dick, Hugh sends me word that he will repay the whole for you.'

Dick offered up, so to speak, a sort of prayer or aspiration concerning the destruction of Hugh. But he was well aware that the repayment of the money was about the surest way of securing himself from pursuit.

'Come,' said the Count, 'write, my friend—write this letter to the young lady, your old friend. Take the pen.'

Dick sat at the table and unwillingly obeyed.

'Write. I will tell you what to say.'

'Go on, then.'

'My dear mademoiselle—or my dear friend——'

'Dear Calista,' wrote Dick. 'There, I knew very well what to say. Listen to this:

'"DEAR CALISTA,

'"The paper which I gave my father about Norah was false from beginning to end. I made it up in order to stop him from taking up the Case himself. I thought that perhaps as he was so fond of Norah he would be staggered and let the thing drop. I thought he would rather believe it was me than believe it was Norah. And it lay between us. Norah did not take the cheques. Norah had nothing to do with them, nor had Daff. Norah presented one of the cheques for me, Daff presented one for me; and if I ever meet that office-boy, I'll wring his neck. You can do what you like with this letter.—Good-bye,

'"DICK MURRIDGE."

'There,' he said, 'take and give that to my father. Tell Norah I didn't mean, at first, to be hard upon her. But it was either her or me. And, besides, she had treated me so badly that I was savage. Tell her that I don't want any forgiving or nonsense. Who cares about forgiveness? All that I want is to be left alone.'

'Oh, thank you, Dick!' Calista received the letter with softened eyes. 'Norah forgives you, whether you want her forgiveness or not. I am very glad I found you. Now good-bye!' She held out both hands. 'Oh, Dick!—poor Dick!—my brother Dick! be good, be honest. There is nothing else in the world worth living for. Be good, Dick.'

Was it by chance or was it by design that the Signor's hands should be in his pockets at that moment, and that there should be the clink of coin?

'Nothing else?' said Dick. 'There is money.'

He turned his face away without taking her hands or being softened by the tears in her beautiful eyes.

The Signor stepped to the door and held it open while Calista passed out. Will there ever, in that unknown future which lies before this young man, fall upon him the memory of this last chance and the tears of the girl who was with him more patient than a sister with a brother, more ready to hear his sorrow, more sure to forgive, and more careful to excuse? Will he ever discover in the years to come that a life of obscurity with honour is better than the life marked out for him of trickery and cheating?

Exactly an hour afterwards another cab drew up at the 'Hotel Entrance' of the tavern. There stepped out of it an old gentleman—none other than Uncle Joseph—and an elderly gentleman, who was Mr. Murridge.

'On the second floor?' you said.

'Second floor—first door on the left when you get to the landing. I'll wait for you down here. You can't miss him, and he's afraid to go out, because of you.'

Mr. Murridge went slowly up the stairs. Any man bound on such an errand would go slowly. He was resolved what to do. There should not be the least appearance of anger. But he should demand a full confession. Otherwise—— He reached the first floor and looked about him. Through an open door he saw a large room filled with little tables, the atmosphere thick with stale tobacco-smoke and the reek of spirits.

'The gambling club,' he said, and mounted to the second floor.

He went to the door indicated, and opened it without knocking. The room bore signs of recent occupation; the bed had not been made since the night, and the bed-clothes were tumbled about; there were cards on the table, and a pipe, and a jug which had contained beer. He thought he must have mistaken the room, and tried the next, and the next. There were some more rooms on the

landing. They all presented the appearance of being family bedrooms. Mr. Murridge slowly came downstairs again.

'You told me the first door on the left,' he said to Uncle Joseph.

'First door on the left it is.'

Mr. Murridge this time sought the landlord in the bar.

The functionary who was in the bar explained that a young gentleman had been staying there some little time, but that he was gone—gone off in a cab that very day. Being asked if he kept a gambling club in the house, he said that he did not; he let his first floor to a social club, which met every night for conversation and tobacco. There might be cards. He did not know the names of the members; it was not his business. The young gentleman who had just gone away paid his bill regular, and was quiet and well-mannered. He kept indoors because he was recovering from an illness. He did not know where he had gone.

Nothing more could be got out of the landlord.

Mr. Murridge came away.

'Well, sir—well?' asked Uncle Joseph. 'You have seen him, and made short work with him, no doubt. Ah, he was penitent, I trust! And you forgave him, on conditions—of course on conditions. It rejoices me to have been the humble means, under Providence, of bringing together father and son, under these most interesting and peculiar circumstances. Sixty pounds, I think you said? And five pounds for the humble Instrument. More Providence! Sixty-five pounds. It is a sad, sad loss.'

'I promised you five pounds for putting the boy into my hands. Well, he is not there.'

'Not there? Mr. Murridge, I give you the word of—of an officer in I don't know how many Lodges, that he was there yesterday.'

'Very likely. He isn't there to-day. However, as you did your best, here's half a sovereign for you.'

He gave the old man this paltry coin, which will do little more than purchase one bottle of really good champagne, and left him standing sorrowfully on the kerbstone.

Half a sovereign! And Uncle Joseph thought he had secured at one stroke, a whole dozen of champagne!

CHAPTER THE LAST.

'My poor dear Norah,' said Calista next morning—she had actually kept her secret the whole night—'is it not time that things should change?'

'They will never change for me,' said Norah. 'I have been thinking what I had better do. I never can go back to Mr. Murridge, that is quite certain; no one else wants a girl who can hunt up genealogies. I could not live at home doing nothing. I have made up my mind, Calista, to become a nurse. I will go to the London Hospital, and become a Probationer, and then I will be a hospital nurse.'

'My dear child, you could not,' said Calista.

'I could, and I will. Why, if Hugh could be a Doctor, and you can be a Sister, cannot I be a nurse? Besides, then I shall be in the same Profession as Hugh, and hearing something about him, though we are parted. I should go mad if I were never to hear anything more of him.'

'Poor Norah! But suppose that it will not be necessary for you to do anything at all—suppose, my dear'—sisters do sometimes kiss each other without feeling the force of Hood's remark about sandwiches of veal—'suppose good news were to come for you?'

'There cannot be any good news for me. Why, Calista, you know that Mr. Murridge will hear of nothing until Dick has an opportunity of meeting his accusers. I, for one, have never accused him—and I never will. And now he has run away, is it likely that he will accuse himself?'

'Never mind what is likely. Think of the very best that could possibly happen.'

'The very best?'

'The very best.'

'Remember, Calista, it is not enough that Hugh should be satisfied. Of course he is satisfied. How can he ever love me unless he respects me? I must have much more than that.'

'You shall have much more.'

'Calista!' Norah caught her hand. 'What have you heard? What have you done? Have you seen him? Have you seen Dick?'

'Patience, dear, for half an hour more, and you shall know all. Tell me, Norah, just this about Dick. Are you very—very bitter about him?'

'I don't know. He has robbed me of Hugh.'

'He will give Hugh back to you. Can you forgive him?'

Norah hesitated.

'I know everything, dear; more than you know, even. Dick has gone. He has fled the country, I believe. There is nothing left us but to forgive him. He will never know whether you have forgiven him or not. But tell me that you do.'

'Oh, what will it help him for me to say that I forgive him? I would not wish to punish him, nor to take revenge, and yet—— Yes, Calista, I forgive him. Poor Dick! we loved him once, did we not?'

'Even if he does not know, it is something that you forgive him. Men's crimes follow them with scourges in their hands—scourges with knots in them, and every knot, for poor Dick, your vengeance and your unforgiveness. Now he will be punished less fearfully. My dear, your trouble is over. No one, not even the most spiteful, will ever be able to hint that there was the slightest truth in this monstrous accusation. No one except ourselves will ever know of it. Come, Norah, to Hugh's room. Someone awaits you there—a most important person, almost as important as Hugh. Come! A most delightful person; and oh, Norah, be prepared for the best news in the world, and for the greatest surprise you ever imagined.'

Calista led her sister to the Resident Medical Officer's room, where they found, besides Hugh, a lady whom Norah recognised at once as Hugh's mother—Madame Aquila, the singer. She was in black silk, that kind of lifelong mourning which some widows adopt. Her face was kindly and soft, still beautiful, though her youth had long since vanished.

'My dear,' she said, taking Norah by both hands, so that she could draw her close and kiss her comfortably—'my dear child, I have heard all. You have greatly suffered. But all is over now. Your sister has made the rough way smooth, and removed the last obstacle. See what it is to be a Sister in the Hospital; how helpful it makes one! And now you will take my Hugh again, will you not? He is worth taking, my dear.'

'Oh,' said Norah, her eyes running over, 'Hugh knows that first——'

'Yes, my dear,' Madame Aquila interrupted; 'Hugh knows exactly what you intend. Not yet, then. We will wait a little.'

They had not long to wait, for steps were heard in the corridor, and the Doctor entered, accompanied by Mr. Murridge.

'Well, Calista,' said the former, 'I am here in reply to your letter. What have you got to tell me?'

'First, here is Madame Aquila, Hugh's mother. Next, you will have to keep perfectly quiet, and not interrupt for five minutes. And then I have got a Surprise for you. Such a Surprise!'

'Not another coronet, I hope?'

'And I am here, Calista,' said Mr. Murridge. 'I have brought with me a certain document, in obedience to your request. What next? My son has left the country, I understand. What next?'

'First, Mr. Murridge, will you withdraw that document, and own to Norah that you have proved it to be false and treacherous from beginning to end, and then tear it up in our presence?'

These were brave words. Mr. Murridge heard them with some surprise.

'I have only to repeat what I said before. I withdraw nothing, and I acknowledge nothing, until my son has had a chance of explanation. I admit—I have never tried to deny—that the case against him is very black. But I will not condemn my own son unheard. The paper shall lie in the safe; the subject shall never be mentioned; Norah can come back as soon as she pleases. But if my son ever returns again—he has gone without a word—he shall have an opportunity of giving any explanation he pleases.'

'Norah can never go back to you until that Document is destroyed, and its contents acknowledged to be false. More than that, she can never renew her broken engagement until you yourself acknowledge that its falsehood has been proved.'

'I cannot help her, then,' said Mr. Murridge coldly.

'I wonder if I might ask what is the meaning of all this?' asked the Doctor. 'I was promised a Surprise, and it begins with a mystery.'

'Presently,' said Calista; 'presently, perhaps. In the meantime, sit down and say nothing. I have got something to show to Mr. Murridge, and then you shall have your Surprise.'

'Perhaps you have another so-called proof,' Mr. Murridge went on. 'I warn you that nothing—nothing but my son's voice—can convince me.'

'Yet you are morally certain?' said Hugh.

'It is not a question of my opinion, but of my son's honour. Listen, Calista. Produce your additional facts, if you have any, and let me go.'

'You shall have his own words, then.' Calista produced her letter. 'Listen to this.'

She read aloud the letter which she had got from Dick.

Norah breathed a deep sigh.

'Why——' began the Doctor, about to ask how anyone in the world could be such an idiot as to suppose that his daughter Norah could be wrongly connected with cheques, but he was peremptorily ordered by Calista to preserve silence.

'Here is the letter, Mr. Murridge. Look at it. You know your son's handwriting. He gave me that letter yesterday afternoon at the place where he was lodging.'

'At what time?'

'At six in the afternoon.'

'I must have missed him,' said Mr. Murridge, 'by an hour.'

'Are you satisfied now?' asked Calista. 'Do you hear his voice in this letter?'

Mr. Murridge read the letter again, as if considering every word, whether it was genuine or not, and whether the signature was really his son's.

'The writing is my son's,' he said, returning the letter. 'What do you wish me to say?'

'Nay, Mr. Murridge; you know what you have to say.'

He still hesitated. Then he drew a paper from his pocket-book, unfolded it, and handed it to Norah.

'It concerns you, Norah,' he said. 'Let me place in your hands the string of falsehoods which has given you so much pain. I cannot offer any excuses. I have no apologies to make for my unhappy son. You do not wish me to tell you what I think of him. I had but one son,' he added sorrowfully. 'As for that boy's father——'

'Oh no—no!' said Norah. 'It is enough. Hugh—tear—burn—destroy this horrible paper! Let us never mention it again. Let us all agree to forget it. Hugh, tear it into a thousand fragments!'

Hugh placed it in the grate, and applied a lighted match to it. In a few seconds Dick's masterpiece was in ashes.

'I have one thing to say, Norah,' added Mr. Murridge. 'On that day when the facts were made clear to me, and the villainies one after the other—the gambling man, and your brother, and the boy—showed that there was one, and only one, guilty person, I would not admit the truth because there was the chance, the chance, that my son might have had something to explain, some kind of excuse. I even tried to persuade myself that there might be a conspiracy against him.'

'He was your son,' said Calista; 'poor Dick!'

'At all events,' said Hugh, 'you might have trusted someone.'

'Young gentleman, I trusted—my own son.'

No one replied.

'I trusted my son,' he repeated; 'I, who have spent my life in calling those people Fools who trust anyone. Norah, will you come back to me?'

Norah looked at Hugh.

'No, sir,' the Resident Medical replied, taking her hand; 'Norah shall not work for you or for anyone else any more. It will be my happiness to work for her.'

'In that case,' said Mr. Murridge, 'and as I have no longer a clerk, and time is money—at least, my time—I will go. Good-bye, Norah.' She gave him her hand. 'I am sorry, my dear. You were a very good clerk to me, worth three times—nay, six times what I gave you. Well, I wish you'—he hesitated, and laughed incredulously—'I wish you what they call happiness in Love and Marriage. I do not quite understand what they mean by Happiness, but I think it chiefly means making believe, and pretending, and shutting your eyes to facts a great deal. If you do that, I don't see why you may not expect to be fairly happy if you have money enough. Of course, that is the first thing. With the recollection of my example, you will naturally never place any hope or belief in the future of a child.'

'Do not go, Mr. Murridge,' said Hugh; 'there remains something which concerns you. It is the Surprise, sir'—he turned to the Doctor—'of which Calista spoke.'

'Now for the Surprise,' said the Doctor. 'After the Mystery comes the History.'

'There is a Surprise about—about the Title,' Hugh began. 'It was as much of a Surprise, when I first learned it, as it will be to you and to Mr. Murridge. To you, I hope, not a disagreeable Surprise. And to Mr. Murridge——'

'Well, what will it be to me?'

'You will see directly. Were you quite sure, Mr. Murridge—perfectly sure, from your information and the inquiries you made, when you bought those reversionary rights, that only two lives stood between the Doctor and the Title?'

Mr. Murridge started.

'Sure? Of course I am quite sure. The late Lord Clonsilla had two brothers. One of them died young, and the other died a few years ago without issue. The next heir was his first cousin, the grandson of the first Viscount and the third Baron. He it was

who died the other day. But the papers took no notice of his death. The next heir is, without the least doubt, the Doctor here. There are other cousins; but they have no claim, and they may be neglected.'

'That is quite right so far; but are you sure that the late Viscount had no children?'

'He had one son, who died young.'

'He died at seven-and-twenty. He died, Mr. Murridge—to my mother's lifelong sorrow—in the second year of his marriage.'

'What!' cried Mr. Murridge. 'To your mother's sorrow?'

'To your mother's lifelong sorrow?' Norah repeated.

The others, I am ashamed to say, not being genealogists, failed to catch the meaning of these simple words.

Then Mrs. Aquila supplemented them, saying softly:

'It is quite true; my husband was the only son of Lord Clonsilla. After his death, I went back to my profession and continued to sing. Hugh is my son. He is, therefore, if he pleases, Lord Clonsilla.'

'You don't mean this, Hugh?' cried the Doctor, springing to his feet.

'It is quite true. If I please, I can call myself by that title,' said Hugh. 'Forgive me, Doctor. Forgive me, Norah. It is only a very short time since I heard this intelligence. But it is quite true. Tell me you do not regret the loss of the Title you had resolved never to wear?'

The Doctor gave Hugh his hand.

'Regret it, my dear boy! I rejoice. I have got sixteen threatening letters, all arrived within the last three days. Here they are, with the coffins and skulls and all complete. You are welcome to them, Hugh; only, my dear boy, you will be shot instead of me——'

'Oh, Hugh!' cried Norah.

'No, my dear,' said her father. 'On second thoughts I'll keep the letters, and Hugh shall be safe. As for me, who ever went out of his way to shoot a walking general practitioner? And as for this Title, it has been on my mind like a dreadful bug-bear ever since I got it. Take it, Hugh—take it!'

'I don't understand this,' said Mr. Murridge. 'I will not stand this at all. If you think, any of you, that I am to give up these estates, which I fairly bought, without a blow for them, you are mistaken.'

'I do not at all expect that you will let things go until you are quite satisfied,' said Hugh.

'I have issued orders to the tenants to pay up, under pain of viction. I will evict them all, if I want the whole British Army it my back.'

'On the contrary,' said Hugh, 'the tenants will be served with notices not to pay you any rent. Then it will be for you, I believe, o find your remedy.'

'Poor Maria!' the Doctor sighed, 'she is no longer Lady Clonla.'

'I am sorry for her disappointment; but Norah will, I hope——

o, dear,' said Hugh; 'let us have done, once and for all, with the ingerbread rubbish. There is neither a noble record, nor a long edigree, nor a single great achievement preserved in such a Title s ours. There is not even the duty of maintaining a great family state. Let us remain what we are, and, if I succeed, let me make name worth having for those who come after us. This will be orth a thousand Titles. As for the inglorious coronet, with the emory of the ignoble services by which it was won, let it go.'

'Yes, Hugh,' said Norah; 'let it go. We will begin afresh.'

Just then Uncle Joseph appeared. He was hot and flushed, ecause he had lost his way in the network of streets between the ommercial Road and the High Street, Shadwell.

'Most important news, Mr. Murridge!' he said. 'News worth elling—news worth hearing. I heard you were come down here, nd I made haste after you.'

'I want no more news,' said Mr. Murridge. 'I think I have had nough.'

'There has been a steamboat accident—a collision. They have ut back, and Mr. Richard, Mr. Murridge—Mr. Richard——'

'What? Is he killed?'

'No, sir, he is not killed. They have put back. His name is in e list of passengers picked up. He can be stopped if you please. ou can have him arrested by telegraph; he is still at Dover.'

Mr. Murridge made no reply. He put on his hat and walked

, really, do you think he has gone to send that telegram?' ncle Joseph. 'And without a word of thanks.'

hen became aware that Norah was in Hugh Aquila's arms, t the young man was kissing her without the least affectaon of concealment.

h' he said, 'I am glad that things are made up. It will take ace soon, Mr. Hugh? I am very happy indeed to think of my rt in bringing together two hearts which will not, I am sure, be

ungrateful. Will the Ceremony of Initiation, I mean of Marriage, take place soon?'

'Very soon, Uncle Joseph,' said Hugh. 'As soon as we can arrange it.'

'There is no ceremony,' said Uncle Joseph with a sweet smile of anticipation, 'no ceremony at all, next to the Inauguration of a new Lodge, where I am more at home than a Wedding Breakfast. On this occasion, Doctor—on this occasion, though our accession to the Peerage, actually to the Peerage, was allowed to pass unnoticed and unmarked in the usual manner—on this occasion I do trust that Champagne will mark the day.'

THE END.

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